

THE
LIVES OF GALLANT
LADIES

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SEIGNEUR & ABBOT OF BRANTOME

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE FRENCH BY *H.M.*

PUSHKIN PRESS

1943

PRINTED BY THE REPLIKA PROCESS
IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
LUND HUMPHRIES
LONDON BRADFORD

PREFACE

THE GREAT CELEBRITY OF THIS WORK, ITS recognition as a classic of French Literature, not only in France but in all civilized countries, gives rise to the question, what is the characteristic for which it is so valued; is it historical, for example, or moral or philosophic, or is it purely literary? It is a work not easily classified, there are objections to including it under any of these four heads; which, however, cover between them all important productions of the human mind. Yet no work can be called unimportant which is received into that most exclusive society, bearing the honourable name of the French Classics; so we cannot feel that we have arrived at a proper appreciation of Brantôme, or have understood the reason of his celebrity, until we discern in him the characteristic value of one of these four classes. It is usually presumed in such a case, that is to say, when the value of a work is felt to be general rather than particular, that it belongs to the class described as *belles lettres* or pure literature; but with all our admiration of the author, we cannot find in his prose any such style or quality as would justify its being classed under this head. It is true that Professor Saintsbury, in his *History of French Literature*, has written. 'Brantôme was emphatically an *écrivain* (unscholarly and Italianised as his phrase sometimes appears, if judged by the standards of a severer age) and some of the best passages from his works are among the most striking examples of French prose.' But is that an opinion at all, containing as it does contradiction within contradiction? it deserves to become the classic example of the non-committal statement. Can a man be a literary artist who has no scholarship? and if he has no scholarship can his French be Italianised, which rather suggests an excess of scholarship? We prefer to side with M. Doumic, who writes in his little manual of French Literature: 'Brantôme is in no way concerned with literature; he sometimes corrects an error of fact, but never of language; he was no writer.' Truly a case of doctors differing!

But there is an important witness yet to be heard, & that is Brantôme himself, who repeatedly declares, no less plainly than M. Doumic, that

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he is no writer; he pleads that he was a soldier who has never been trained in the art of letters, a preliminary that the French have always been eccentric enough to think necessary. His life was devoted to action, and when he was crippled by an accident toward the end of it, his activity took the form of pouring out torrentially, without meditation or selection, the immense fund of his experience; at least there was no conscious selection at the time of writing, but all through his life his memory had been choosing most critically what it would retain and what not, so that his writing has pre-eminently that stamp of individuality which in any class is the true title to greatness. Now this recoding of facts begins to sound very like history; what, then, is the difficulty of classifying Brantôme's work as historical? This for one, that his record is unreliable; we can put him right not only about the facts of his time, but about the persons also. To this Brantôme might reply, 'So you can with any other historian, as your Gibbon or your Carlyle; in fact you can do anything with history but write it!' Alas! too true; before this charge we can only hang our heads. Our histories are Frankensteins, an assemblage of mechanical parts, each the work of a specialist, faithfully objective in his studies; but they give no life to the past, for there is neither life nor love in themselves. Ah, love! did mortal man ever so abound in it as Brantôme? did such a sweet stream of praise ever pour from human lips, praise of the gay and gallant lady, and again praise of the chaste and constant? The god of the bow had fairly blindfolded him, how could he be precise in his facts? he was the subjective, the creative historian, & thanks to him the Sixteenth Century walks and talks for us, a creature of warm flesh and a beating heart, whose very breath we may feel on our cheeks as we read his pages.

Gibbon was likewise blindfolded, and so was Carlyle; each chose what he would tell, and often what he would find to tell, as Brantôme; not consciously at the time of writing, but by a filtration of facts through the memory, that dreamy domain of the heart. So that these three subjective writers, under the form of a history of some period, were each asserting

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his own character, painting his own portrait as the artist always is; not that they lacked interest in the objects of their study, on the contrary they loved them so intensely that they saw the objects as their very selves, and themselves as the objects. No matter when Brantôme had lived, we know instinctively that he would have told the same stories, would have described the same characters and the same manners; which seems at first sight to mean that such a record must be worthless as history, whatever it may be as literature or philosophy or morals. Yet it is the only sort of record that has value as history; for it is a natural growth of the period it describes, a record from within rather than from without, and so there is no fear of a Brantôme taking up his pen to write at all in another period, not specially characterised by the same manners and persons. As a matter of fact Brantôme is born in every generation, many of us have met him in our own; but he is not aroused to describe our manners because he does not see in them his match and mate, and so his love lies dormant.

It is just the same with Gibbon, though he described other times than his own, a millenium instead of a life-time; for the decline of the Roman Empire was condensed in the England of the Eighteenth Century, from the classic elegance & stability of Queen Anne to the anarchy, not limited to France, of the French Revolution, in the shadow of whose approach Gibbon wrote. The polite irony of that famous chapter on the Primitive Church, the cold dignity of his ordered sentences, following one another as regularly and as eternally as waves of the cold sea, what does this all express? just the resistance of the classicism of Queen Anne to the sentimental humanitarianism preparing the Revolution, before which it knew itself doomed to fall, and sought perpetuation in a record passionately cold. Carlyle in turn left a record of the elemental energies released by that Revolution, energies of war and of law-making, of scientific investigation and of poetry; he might make Cromwell his hero or Frederick, but what he was in love with was his own image reflected in the Herculean labours, which characterised the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Brantôme was a historian as reliable as these two because he left

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us a portrait of himself that is no less alive and convincing than theirs; we know these three historians, and consequently the ages they lived in and loved, as well or better than we know our own brothers and sisters.

If Brantôme's objective portraiture lacks sharpness, if we see no lively contrasts of character in the kings and captains he describes, it is a pretty safe inference, that in his age individuality was not a dominant force, or was rather shewn in its own modification; it is always so in a formal aristocracy, whose strength lies in the co-operation of men to maintain its forms, that is to say, in the subordination of character to manners. In Carlyle, on the contrary, we find all the emphasis on individual character, and neglect or even scorn of manneis; for the age he lived in and loved was revolutionary and democratic, its strength lay in the competitiveness of men, by which the forms of aristocracy had lately been disrupted. We agree again with M. Doumic when he says of Brantôme, that he was incapable of composing a portrait, because he only saw the external surfaces of his persons. In other words, all he was interested in was the social contact between persons, which smoothes away the angles of character, not the internal strife of each singly, which produces character as a spark. Professor Saintsbury again takes the opposite view, & one is at a loss to know how he could support it: 'Few writers,' he says, 'have had the knack of hitting off character, superficially it is true, yet with sufficient distinction, which Brantôme has. There is something individual about all the innumerable characters who move across his stage. . . .' But again, is it a view at all? the admission of superficiality contradicts so flatly the assertion of individual penetration. Consider the facts; there was the greatest possible contrast between King Francis I and King Francis II, and again between King Henry III and King Henry IV, and one of the four is mentioned on nearly every page of Brantôme, who was personally acquainted with them all, though with the first only in childhood; yet a person ignorant of French history might read his works through and through, without so much as getting an inkling of these two most striking contrasts. Character is entirely subordinated to manners in Brantôme, a

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sacrifice which is required of any age, before it can give individual being to society; it was this achievement that Brantôme arose to celebrate, & we are happy to be able to endorse Professor Saintsbury when he says: 'He represents, as hardly any age has ever been represented, the characteristics of the great society of his time.' In blurring the distinctions of persons, he was a truer historian of his time, than he would have been in presenting them sharply, as our objective research is able to do for us; the distinctions existed but they were irrelevant, & Brantôme by his love was guided to a true judgment. Nor is anything lost thereby, for the same distinctions are repeated in every generation; they all appear under other names in Carlyle, to whose time they were highly relevant.

But if we decide on these accounts to class Brantôme as a historian, the question arises why he concerns himself so little with the affairs of nations, which are generally understood to be the proper subject of history: these are only sketched in by him in low tones, like the landscape background of an Eighteenth Century portrait; the relations of France to England and Spain and the Empire, which might seem to constitute the history of the Sixteenth Century, only appear dimly as a background to the butterfly politics of the French Court. Again this is only a proof of Brantôme's true seriousness, for the French Court was in itself the Europe of his time; whatever happened throughout the Country of France, or in the other countries her neighbours, was but a widening ripple from the great splash in Paris. To say this of Shakespeare's England may seem a strange disloyalty, yet Shakespeare accepted the moral values of the English Court, which was admittedly a copy of the French; the assertion of independent values only began with John Bunyan half a century later, when the rose of France was full-blown and ready to seed.

Brantôme was exactly contemporary with Shakespeare, the two having been born in the same decade, & writing their masterpieces, *Hamlet* and *Gallant Ladies* in the same year. The period of Brantôme's military career was the reign of Elizabeth down to the Spanish Armada; in the year following this died Catherine de Medicis, the Queen-mother of

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three reigns who had been Brantôme's chief employer, and he was about to take service with Philip II of Spain when a providential fall from his horse disabled him for life, and so at the age of fifty his energies were turned to writing. At the accession of Elizabeth he was eighteen years old, and two years later he went to Scotland in the suite of the tragical Queen Mary, just widowed by the death of the young King Francis II; after this he served in the religious wars of France, in the Spanish war in Morocco and in the Hungarian war with the encroaching Turk. But his headquarters was always the French Court, where the politics of the world had their source in personal loves & jealousies, & where 'great persons' were truly great. Politics is always but an extension of manners, or that equal association of the sexes, in which the stronger male restrains himself in order to increase his strength by alliance with the female, after his increase by individual growth has ceased; this is the idea at the root of that alliance of individuals called a state, and again of the alliances between individual states. So Brantôme in concentrating on the manners of the Court was most purely a historian, inasmuch as he studied the proper subject of history in its pure origins; and if this idealism suggests rather poetry or pure literature, it is the same with Carlyle and Gibbon, both of whom seem often to have more of the poet than of the historian in them.

Living as we do to-day in a topsy-turvy world, the product of great social upheavals, it is hard for us to take seriously either manners or politics, both of which continue only as superstitious forms; our highest energies are directed toward science and art, and our puppet kings and posturing gentlemen only quicken in us the faculty of humour, the lack of which in Brantôme and his contemporaries continually surprises us. For example, when Brantôme relates that the Queen-mother gave her royal son leave to listen to spicy stories on condition that he repeated them only to her, so that she might administer correction to the ladies involved, our humour is on to this like a hawk; yet Brantôme relates it without a smile, without the quiver of an eyelid, so real to him are the

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forms of government and the responsibilities of a queen. Conversely, much of the wit which to Brantôme was such lively rapier-play is to us a case of two dead men getting up to fight, and we look from the scene to the smiling impressario in glum amazement; we have to remind ourselves continually that what is a propped up mummy in our day was then the very fount of life. Nor does it detract anything from the historical character of Brantôme's anecdotes that we can discern in them traditional matter, passed down from age to age and from nation to nation, and only attached by him to certain occurrences of his time, more or less corresponding; for we learn thereby that such occurrences were the dominant power in his time, else he could not have recorded them with such passionate enthusiasm.

This concentration on manners has necessarily led Brantôme into conflict with the moralists, whose standpoint is directly opposed to his; for whereas manners means the association or combination of the sexes, morals means their dissociation or mutual abstention. Yet it does not mean that Brantôme must lack morals, on the contrary every idea needs to be corrected by its opposite, only manners with him will predominate in the compound; in the same way religion predominates in theology, but there must be an element of philosophy its opposite. On the question of the moral element in Brantôme we find again flat contradiction between the two professors quoted, M. Doumic declaring that Brantôme is entirely deficient in moral conscience, while Professor Saintsbury finds 'a considerable vein of moralising in Brantôme.' It is so considerable, we should say, as to become positively tedious on occasions; indeed, if we were asked to name the chief blemish in this history of manners, we should say the patches of unsubordinated morals, as when the author discourses for page after page on the virtue of widows abstaining from second marriage. For the most part the work is a shot web of two colours, Pagan manners and Christian morals catching the light alternately in beautiful interplay; the whole giving a lively figure of the essential history of the Sixteenth Century.

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For Europe was then a battlefield of two ideas, represented by the ecclesiastical Christianity of Rome and the Pagan nationalism of the Lutherans; with this curious complication, that as the Universal Church only survived as a form, it had more of a political than a religious character, while the burning idea of nationalism was more religious than political. Thus the great Henri Quatre, who as a private person was an ardent Lutheran or nationalist, found on taking office as a national King that he had inevitably joined the party of the Universal Church; so the simple Brantôme may be excused if in his bewilderment he fought sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, especially as the two ideas were so nearly balanced in his character. Perhaps it was his very simplicity that gave him discernment to know that where the great issue was truly being decided was not in the Civil Wars between Catholic & Protestant any more than in the national wars between the sons of Catherine de Medicis and Elizabeth of England and Philip of Spain, but in the clash of personalities in the close contact of a single great household. His allusions to the terrible massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Eve, which occurred in his thirty-third year, are frequent; but he never took it seriously as a political or religious event, and seems to have been little shocked by such inhuman bloodshed; to him it was mainly a social event, as suddenly unloading on society a disproportionate number of widows, in whose behaviour there was opportunity to study the interplay of Christianity and Paganism. But Brantôme was no cold or unsympathetic student, the need of his life was to praise, & he advances on the widows with Christian praise in one hand and Pagan praise in the other, and many of them he pelts with both in turn; occasionally he feels it his duty to criticise, but his words have as little malice in them as the rice thrown at a bride.

Pagan manners in this book is really an inverted morality, for in all the Olympian laughter over the gallantry of ladies, and the cuckolding of husbands and lovers, Brantôme is like Mrs. Battle at her whist, more attracted by 'the rigour of the game' than by its soft pleasures. He may side with the seducer who wins a lady to infidelity, but only in so far as

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the seducer proves himself the better man; let him fail to acquit himself as a hero, either in bed with the lady or in conflict with the jealous husband, and at once he will be the butt for gay mockery. Ladies too must justify their entry on the paths of pleasure, they must be young & beautiful & witty, or their pretensions will be shewn up in the same cold light. What it all amounts to is a system of natural eugenics, by which the unfit are eliminated from the business of breeding, and sent to the monastery where they can become useful in other ways; Brantôme shews in his moralising passages, that he always has that alternative in mind, he lived near enough to the Middle Ages for that. His work in the main is a great anthem to Nature, that good captain, as he says in a passage truly lyrical, who will lead us in the right way if we only trust her. Professor Saintsbury says on this subject, 'No writer perhaps has ever put things more disgraceful on paper, but no writer has ever written of such things in such a perfectly natural manner.' Brantôme's natural manner is no less than a passionate profession of faith; and even if his matter had sometimes been so extremely indecent, in which we cannot agree, there would be the more to praise in his naturalness.

If any are offended by this gospel of natural eugenics, let them consider if they would prefer the only alternative, which is the national stud-farm advocated by some extreme socialists; at present we are deprived by our prudery of either check, and a drivelling & impotent lust has free entry to every house, like a sentimental sneak that all hate but cannot banish. If the human race is not to degenerate beyond recognition, we shall have to choose between the methods of the stable and the methods of Olympus, the latter meaning the fresh-air laughter of a Brantôme; whose apparent snobbery, his frequently expressed disregard for people of no rank, only proves his devotion to the idea of selective breeding. So much are his persons a race distinct from common humanity, that they give one a feeling of being in fairy-land; but they are true open-air fairies, with the sharpness of the East wind in them as often as the sweetness of the rose, and have none of the stuffy dressed up feeling there is about the

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fairies of Andersen and Grimm, at least in the version of their stories given to us in childhood. They are the fairies who carry the pollen from the male flower to the female, who guide the buck to the doe & the cock to the hen, in short they are the fairies who make the world go round; the active love of the male for the female, that is Brantôme's theme, as opposed to the suffering love of the female for the male within her, the theme of moralists with their praise of chastity. Each love is the complement of the other, & has only value when held in check by the other; so that in his praise of the gay and gallant life, Brantôme is as true a moralist as Saint Gregory.

But of any such philosophy he was as innocent as the fairies themselves; it is only on rare occasions that his narrative of action pauses, to indulge (with knuckles to cheek and one finger to temple) in rational reflexion, and then the result can only be described as comic. Of his philosophic contemporary, & neighbour in *Périgord*, the great Montaigne, he never speaks; though he is interested enough in the literature of his time, quoting often from Ronsard's *Sonnets*, written in Brantôme's boyhood, and being steeped in Amyot's *Plutarch* of the same date, with its anecdotes of action to delight his heart. He is first and last the man of action, exuberantly in love with life or things as they are, always represented to his mind as a gallant lady; hear the ring in the simple and awkward words, with which at the end of this book he makes his final bow to the ladies, '*Or, mes dames, je fais fin !*' What a mystery is poetry, that somewhere in that little sentence can lurk a power to stir the heart! It must be in the definite selection of an object to love, in the singling out of the ladies as an idea; Brantôme never had to ask as Pindar, 'What god, what hero shall we praise?' he knew but one thing praiseworthy, the gallant lady that is life.

FRANCIS MACNAMARA.

THE FIRST DISCOURSE

*Concerning those Gallant Ladies who play the Pleasant
Game of Love, & their cucko'd Husbands*

AS 'T WAS ASSUREDLY THE LADIES WHO DUG & builded the foundations of Cuckoldom, & as the cucko'ing of men is their handiwork, I have thought it most proper to place this Discourse in my book of gallant ladies, 'though I shall speak as much of men as of women. I know well enough that I am entering upon a great undertaking, & that if I would bring it to fair finish & completion I should never so much as see the end of my labour; for all the paper in the Exchequer of Paris would not hold one half the written tale of their doings, either women or men. Nevertheless I shall write as much thereof as I am able, and when I can no more I will leave my pen to the Devil, or whatever good fellow will take it up again, excusing myself if in this discourse I observe neither order nor sequence, for the number of these Persons is so large, so confused, and so diverse in character, that the best drill-sergeant in the world would be hard put to it to marshal them into rank and formation.

Following, therefore, my fancy, I shall write as best pleases me, in this present month of April which brings with it the season and sport of the cuckoo; but more particularly of young branchers, since other kinds are to be seen in plenty, in every month and season of the year.

Of this species Cuckoo there are many and diverse varieties; but the worst of them all & the most feared by Ladies (& with reason) are those mad, dangerous, extravagant, evil-hearted, cruel, bloodthirsty and distrustful husbands who strike, hurt and kill, sometimes on true counts but as often on false, so enflamed do they become by the smallest suspicion. Converse with such men is best avoided, both by Wives and by Gallants. Nevertheless, I have known Ladies and their lovers who cared nothing for Husbands; for the lovers were as hot-tempered as they, nor were the Ladies wanting in courage; so much indeed, that if their Gallants were not bold to their liking they forthwith dismissed them. For the more perilous and ticklish the enterprize, the better stomach is needed for its execution. Other Ladies I have known who had neither stomach nor

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ambition for such high adventures, & found their amusement in meaner undertakings. Whereto there is a saying: Mean as a Whore.

¶ I once knew an honest Lady, of no slight rank, whose gallant, when a good occasion offered for the enjoyment of their loves, pointed out to her the unhappy consequence if her husband (who was not far away) should come upon them. Whereupon she ceased her play, and would have no more ado with him, saying that he was not bold enough for a lover, nor fit to serve the desires of a gallant Lady: for indeed, when her mind is fixed upon an ardent adventure, there is nothing which more vexes and angers such a lady than a lover who either will not, or, from some mischance or hindrance, cannot give her instant joy and solace of her love.

One cannot but praise this lady's courage, and the courage of others of her kind, who are without fear in the achievement of their loves, although they run greater risk and danger thereat than a soldier or a sailor in the most perilous hazards of war or of the seas.

¶ A certain Spanish lady was once strolling at large in the royal palace with a gallant of the Court when they chanced to pass by a curtained and hidden alcove. After the discreet and respectful manner of his country he said to her: *Señora, buen lugar, si no fuera vuessa merced*. The lady answered: *Sí, buen lugar, si no fuera vuessa merced*—‘That were a happy place, if ’twere another than thou.’ ‘Aye, indeed, if ’twere another than thou’—thus accusing and convicting him of cowardice in not having taken of her in such happy circumstances that which she desired as much as he, and which a bolder might have won; and on this account she left him and would love him no longer.

¶ I have heard tell of a very fair and honest lady who gave an assignation to her lover to sleep with her, upon the condition that he would make no lover's essays, nor so much as touch her person; which indeed he accomplished, passing the night through in great rigour, temptation and continence. For this obedience to her desires he was so endeared to her that some little while afterwards she gave herself to him, telling him as reason for her action that she had been minded first to prove his devotion; and

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on that account continued more & more to love him, saying that by this great trial and adventure he had shown himself fit for other trials and adventures as great, but of another kind.

Some will praise this gentleman for his discretion, others blame him for a faint-heart. For my part I shall agree with the arguments & opinions of both parties in this matter.

¶ I knew a lady of considerable rank who gave an assignation to her lover to pass the night with her. He presented himself in his nightshirt, eager to do his duty; but, inasmuch as it was winter and very cold, he had become so chilled on his way that when he was a-bed he was good for nothing, and could think only of getting warm; wherefore the lady conceived a hatred for him and would have no more ado with him.

¶ Another lady was in love with a certain gentleman who said to her, among other amorous sallies, that if he might pass the night with her he undertook to ride six stages before morning, so hotly would he spur for the love of her beauty. 'You boast high,' said she; 'on such-and-such a night your boasting shall have its trial'—whereunto he was not slow to agree. But, by great misfortune, as soon as they were a-bed he was overcome with such cold convulsion and slacking of nerves that he was not able to ride so much as one; whereat the lady said to him: 'Have you nought else to shew me? Away out of my bed then! I did not bid you here as to a tavern-bed, to take your ease in it, & sleep. Therefore, away with you!' And in this manner she sent him away, and thereafter spent much mockery upon him, hating him worse than the plague.

This gentleman would have been more fortunate had he been of the complexion of that great protonotary Baraud, Almoner to King Francis, who, when he lay with the ladies of the court, stayed at least his dozen; and in the morning he would say moreover: 'Pray excuse me, Madam, that I have done no better, for I took physick yesterday.' I have seen him since that time: he called himself Captain Baraud and had put off his gown; and told me many stories of his amours, with the names of the ladies.

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In his old age this virile and venereal energy failed him. He was poor, though his good weapon had earned him wealth enough in his time, but he had lost what he had, and occupied himself with the making and distillation of essences. 'But,' said he, 'if I could but distil the good essence of my youth, my affairs would be in better order and heart.'

¶ During the wais of the League an honest gentlemen of great courage and gallantry, who had gone from the town whereof he was governor to join in the fighting & was on his way home again, finding himself unable to reach his garrison before nightfall, put up with a fair and very honest widow of high rank, who begged him to spend the night in her house. This invitation he was in no mind to refuse, being worn out with travel. After she had handsomely entertained him at supper, she led him to her own room and her own bed, saying that all the other rooms were stripped on account of the war and the furniture stored in a safe place, and that she herself would sleep in her dressing closet, where she had a couch.

The gentleman, after several times refusing this room and this bed, was constrained by the lady's insistence to accept it. After he was a-bed and asleep, back came the lady and sweetly lay beside him; whereof he perceived nought the whole night through, being very weary and in a deep slumber, and so lay until morning was high, when the lady left his side just as he was waking, saying: 'You have not slept lonely, as you see, for I was not minded to let you have the whole of my bed, & have taken my share of it with you. Farewell: you have let slip an occasion that will never come again.'

The gentleman, cursing and railing at such good fortune missed (as well he might) would have stopped her going and besought her; but she would have none of it and was mighty vexed with him for not having solaced her as she had wished; forasmuch as she had not come thither for a single bout of love (whereto there is the saying that a single bout is but the *salad* of the bed) but rather for a night's play, not for the Singular but the Plural, which many ladies much prefer in this matter. In this she

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differed greatly from another very fair & honest lady of my acquaintance who once gave an assignation to her lover to lie with her & in a trice had of him three fair bouts of love, and then, when he would have added a *quart* to his *tierce* and continued in this mounting of the score, she prayed and ordered him to desist and leave her bed. But he, who was as fresh as at first, was for continuing the combat, and promised that he would rage the night through, until full daylight, and that so small a matter had in no wise diminished his vigour. 'Be content,' she said, 'that I have satisfied myself of your prowess, which is indeed of the best, and of which in another time and place I shall be better able to avail myself than now, for it needs but a small mishap to discover us to my husband, to my undoing. Farewell, then, until a surer place and season, when I will gaily call you to pitched battle, and not to so petty a skirmish.'

There are many ladies who would not have known such prudence when they had the enemy fairly in the field, but, drunk with pleasure, would have kept him fighting until daybreak

This honest lady of whom I spoke earlier was of such spirit that when the fancy took her she had no fear nor apprehension of her husband, though he was a good swordsman and quick to take umbrage; nevertheless she was so fortunate that neither she nor her lover ever came to harm, having escaped all traps & surprizes, inasmuch as she was at pains to keep vigilant guards & sentries well placed about her person. But ladies should not put too much reliance upon this precaution, for it needs but one turn of ill-fortune to bring disaster; as fell a little while back upon a certain brave and valiant gentleman' who was assassinated on his way to visit his mistress, by the betrayal & evil deed of the lady herself under the order of her husband. If he had not been so confident in his own might he would certainly have taken more care of his person, and would not now be dead, as is much to be regretted. A warning indeed, that we should not put our trust altogether in amorous ladies, who in order to escape their husband's cruel hand play whatever game they will, as did this lady in question, who kept her own life safe at the cost of her lover's.

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¶ There are other husbands who kill both wife and gallant together, as I have heard tell of a very great lady whose husband was struck with jealousy—not for any harm that she did him, but from mere vain suspicion—and brought about her death by slow poison, to his own great despite and ill-fame; having first put to death the gallant, a man of good repute, saying that 'twas a finer and more acceptable sacrifice to kill the bull first and the cow afterwards.

This Prince^a was more cruel to his wife than to one of his daughters, whom he had married to a great Prince (though a less great than he, who was almost a King).

It so happened that this foolish woman let herself be got with child by another man than her husband, who was away at some war; and then, having brought forth a pretty brat, knew not to what saint to turn for succour, unless to her father, to whom she explained the whole matter by the intermediary of a trusted gentleman. As soon as he heard it he sent word to her husband, that if he valued his own life he should make no attempt upon that of the lady his daughter, or he would in turn attempt his, and make him the poorest Prince in Christendom, as he well could. And he also sent a galley and escort to his daughter to fetch the child and its nurse, and thereafter appointed it a fine house and establishment, and had it well cared for and brought up. But at the end of some little while the old man died, whereupon the younger Prince put his wife to death forthwith.

¶ I have heard tell of another husband who had his wife's gallant done to death before her eyes, and this slowly and with divers tortures, to such effect that she died of sorrow to see him whom she had loved and held in her arms expiring in such torment.

¶ Another gentleman of the great world murdered his wife out of hand, after having given her every liberty for the space of fifteen years,^b and knowing well enough the life she led, even to the point of admonishment upon that account. Of a sudden an impulse took him ('twas commonly said, at the prompting of the prince his master), and he came to her bed

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one morning as she was on the point of rising, and after lying beside her, teasing her and laughing with her for a while, stabbed her four or five times with a dagger and left her for one of his servants to finish; then had her placed on a bier and carried out from his house to burial, before the eyes of the multitude. When all was done he returned and shewed himself among the court, as if he had done the finest thing in the world, and boasted of it. He would have served her lovers in like manner, but for their large number, which was sufficient to make a little army, & would have given him too great labour.

¶ I have heard tell of a brave and valiant Captain who, upon receiving evidence against his wife, sought her out forthwith & strangled her with her own white scarf; then had her buried in the most honourable manner possible, attending her bier with every sign of grief and dressed in deep mourning, which he continued to wear a long while after. And so the poor woman must be content, and get what resuscitation she could from the fine ceremony. Also to one of her ladies, who was accomplice in her amours, he did the same. He was not without descendants by this said unhappy wife, for she had given him a gallant son, one of the greatest and most valiant men of his country, who by reason of his great worth and service to his King was advanced to the highest dignities.

¶ I have heard tell also of a noble of Italy² who killed his wife after this fashion, but could not get her lover, who had fled into France. But it was commonly said that he did this not so much on account of her sin—for he had known long enough that she played the game of love, & made no bones about it—as to marry another lady of whom he was enamoured.

¶ Thus 'tis dangerous to assault a lady's Virtue when it is well armed and protected with a good sword, though indeed there have been many such assaults and a goodly number of victories, as happened to one lady³ of my acquaintance who was as mightily armed as any in the world. There was a certain courtly & valiant gentleman who was minded to play the gallant in that quarter, & was not content with his victory, but must needs publish it abroad and make a boast of it; but before he could long continue

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in this course he was privily slain by hired men, without further scandal or any evil consequence for the lady. She was, however, not without apprehension, since she was with child, and feared lest after her lying-in (which she would gladly have prolonged a hundred years) she should come by the same end. But her husband, who was a worthy man & compassionate, although one of the best swordsmen alive, forgave her, and was content with the price he had exacted, despite great alarm among several other of her lovers, & that one unhappy gentleman paid for them all. And the lady, recognizing the goodness and grace of such a husband, gave him but slight suspicion thereafter, being consistently virtuous and discreet.

¶ A very different fate befel Donna Maria d'Avalos in the Kingdom of Naples not long ago. She was one of the fairest princesses in the land, wife of the Prince of Venosa, and became enamoured of the Count of Andriano, himself the handsomest of princes. They were surprized by her husband (by a stratagem which I would detail, but that the account thereof would take too long) who found them a-bed together, and had them both done to death forthwith by hired men. And on the morrow the passers-by found those two beautiful bodies stretched together on the ground before the street door, cold & stiff, for all the world to see, whereat many paused to weep over them and pity their sad condition.

There were some among the relatives of the dead lady who took deep offence at this business, although in accordance with the laws of that country; saying that she had been done to death by knaves and servants whose hands were unworthy to shed such fair and noble blood, and that her husband should rather have given the stroke with his own hand, and on this score alone they would have had vengeance on him either by law or otherwise; but nought came of it.

That, by your leave, is a foolish & extravagant consideration, whereof I beg the judgment of our great lawyers and jurisconsults; whether 'tis more monstrous to kill by your own hand the wife you have loved, or by that of a rogue or a slave? There are many arguments for this and that

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opinion, which I will forbear to mention, fearing lest they should seem too light and inconsiderable besides those of such great Persons.

I have heard it said that the Viceroy, who was uncle to the lady, warned her and her lover when he heard of the stratagem afoot; but such was to be their destiny, and the conclusion of their sweet loves.

This lady was daughter of Don Carlo d'Avalos, second brother of the Marquis di Pescayra, who would himself have been dead a long while past if such fortune had befallen any one of his amours.

¶ I knew a certain Gentleman who returned from abroad after a long deprivation and absence from his wife, and came home joyous and eager to lie with her & have his joy of her again. But on his arrival late one night he heard from the *little spy* that she had a lover a-bed with her; whereupon he instantly laid his hand upon his sword and entered the chamber determined to slay her. And after seeking vainly for the lover (who had fled by the window) he was about to execute his resolve when she flung herself at his feet, clinging to his knees and asking his pardon with soft and gentle words, as she very well knew how; and, seeing how prettily she was coifed and decked in her white shift (for you may be sure she had spared no pains to make herself fair for her lover) and how sweetly fashioned—better, indeed, to his liking & desire than he had ever known her before—his resolve melted away, & he let fall his sword and raised her from the ground; and, remembering his long hunger for her, forgave her and kissed her and laid her again on the bed, and then shut the door upon the household and quickly undressed and lay with her: and the lady contented him so well with her sweet ways and pretty play (whereof she had forgotten nothing) that by morning they were better friends than before, and had never been so prodigal of caresses. So, likewise, did the poor cuckold Menelaus, who for the space of ten or twelve years threatened his wife Helen with instant death if ever he could reach her, even taking his oath to it before her from the foot of the city walls; but when Troy had fallen and she in his hands he was so ravished with her beauty that he forgave her all, and loved and fondled her more than ever before.

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Such sort of anger in husbands is indeed excellent, wherewith they are like Lions changed suddenly into Butterflies; but it is none the less unwise to risk such perilous encounters.

¶ A certain great Lady⁶ of the reign of King Francis I, the beautiful young wife of a French nobleman, and of as mighty a house as any in the land, saved herself from her fate by quite other and more laudable means than the foregoing; for one day, either for some cause or suspicion she had given him or from a sudden rage or umbrage which overcame him, her husband went at her with a naked sword in his hand, swearing to kill her; whereupon, despairing of any human aid in her peril, she suddenly thought to call upon the glorious Virgin Mary, promising, if her life werē spared, to accomplish her vow in the Lady Chapel of *Lorette*, at *Saint Jean de Mauverets*, in the land of *Anjou*. And no sooner had she taken this vow in her heart than her lord pitched forward on the ground and his sword dropped from his hand; then, rising again, he asked of his wife like one waking from a dream what saint she had called upon to save her from this peril. She told him that she had taken a vow to the Virgin Mary, for her said chapel, and had promised to travel to that holy place. 'Go, then,' said he, 'and accomplish your vow'; which she did in due order, & put up a tablet containing the whole story, together with several tokens of wax according to the custom of that time, which were to be seen there long afterwards. That was certainly a fair and mighty vow, & a most strange adventure, as you may find it written down in the *Chronicle of Anjou*.

¶ I have heard tell of King Francis that once when he was minded to lie with a certain lady of the Court,⁷ of whom he was amorous, he found her husband waiting, sword in hand and ready to kill him. But the King held his own sword to his throat and ordered him, as he valued his life, to do him no hurt, vowing that if he so much as moved a finger against him he would either kill him there and then or have him executed; and for that night drove him from the room, and took his place.

This lady was indeed fortunate to have found so able a champion and

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protector of her Fancy, for thereafter her husband dare not speak a word to her, and let her do all that she would.

I have heard it said that not only this lady, but many another, found a like champion in the King. For just as in war time many gentlemen put up the King's arms over their gates for the better safety of their lands, so also do those gallant ladies for their fair bodies, and, in this way, contrive it that their husbands dare not even utter a word in remonstrance, who would otherwise spit them without demur upon their swords.

¶ I have myself known ladies, favoured of Kings and great Personages, who carried their passports with them in this wise wherever they went; but despite every safeguard there were some who overstepped their limit, whom their husbands killed by poison, or other hidden and secret deaths, not daring to draw the blade upon them; & afterwards gave out and made believe that 'twas strokes, apoplexies or other sudden accidents. Such husbands are detestable, content to watch their beautiful wives lying sick beside them, fading away from day to day, and drawing toward death; and themselves deserve to die rather than their wives. Others, again, do them to death between four walls, in perpetual confinement, as we find accounts in the ancient chronicles of France, and as I myself knew of in the case of one of our own Nobles, who brought about his fair and honest lady's end in such wise (& this by sentence of the court), taking his palt'ry pleasure in thus publishing his cuckoldom.

Old men in particular are apt to fury and mad rage when they are cucko'd, for the reason that they mistrust their own warmth and abilities while confident of their wives', more particularly when they have been so foolish as to marry very young and pretty women. With their jealousies and suspicion (both from the said circumstance of nature and from the recollection of the tricks they themselves played in youth upon like elder husbands) they lead their poor sweet creatures a life of utter misery, until they are near wishing themselves in Purgatory, which would be kindlier than such authority. The Spaniards say: *El diablo sabe mucho, porque es viejo*, 'the Devil knows much, because he is old.' And in

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like wise these husbands, from their great age and old experience, are vastly wise in such matters. They are much to blame for the misfortunes which follow, inasmuch as if they cannot content their wives themselves wherefore do they marry them? And such young and lovely ladies do great wrong in entering upon such marriages, which they do under the shelter of riches, thinking to enjoy them after the death of their husbands, which they await from one day to another; and meanwhile enjoy their youth with young lovers, whereby many have reached an untimely end. ¶ I have heard tell of one such old husband who surprized his wife in her loves, and gave her a poison whereof she languished more than a year and became as dry as wood; and went often to see her, taking pleasure in this withering, and laughing at her, saying that she had no more than she deserved.

¶ Another fair lady was locked up by her husband in a single room, and put upon bread and water, & from time to time he would strip her naked and beat her his fill, having no compassion on this poor naked flesh, nor emotion at the sight of it. That is, indeed, the worst of these old men; for being without warmth themselves, and as free of desire as a marble statue, they are unmoved by any loveliness, & slake their rages in cruelty & martyrdom, whereas younger men would choose other means of satisfaction with such fair naked bodies, as I have told of a certain gentleman a little way back.

Thus it is an evil thing to marry such extravagant old men, for although their eyesight may fail them with age, 'tis always keen enough to spy upon their wives and discover their merry play.

¶ I have heard a great lady say that no Saturday was without Sunday; no pretty woman without amours; and no old man without jealousy; and that as certainly as all these things an old man's force must vanish away.

On this account a certain Prince of my acquaintance has been heard to say that he would willingly be like the Lion, who ages without grey hairs; and the Monkey, whose heat increases with practice; and the Dog, whose flesh grows with age; and the Stag, who mates more fiercely the

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older he gets, so that the roes go rather to him than to the young bucks.

But, to tell the truth in this matter, as I have heard it maintained from the lips of a Great Personage, what reason has a husband, or what right, however great he may be or whatever his authority, to put his wife to death, seeing that he has no licence to this from God, nor from God's law, nor from the holy Gospels, but only to repudiation? There is no talk in the Scriptures of death, blood, murder, torment, prison, poison, nor other cruel punishment. Aye, and has not our Lord Jesus Christ shewn us clearly enough that such acts are evil and an abuse of strength, and that he in no wise approved them? as when they brought him the poor woman taken in adultery to pass judgment upon her, and he said, writing with his finger on the ground, that whosoever among them was without sin, let him cast the first stone, and none dared do it, feeling themselves shamed by such wise and gentle reproof.

Our creator teaches us that we should not be so light and ready in condemning man or woman to death, even on such a head as this, knowing well the frailties of our nature and our abuse thereof; for such a one puts his wife to death, who is a greater adulterer than she, and another when she is innocent, being angered against her from some mere rumour or tattle he has heard; & all to what purpose? Saint Augustine tells us that the man guilty of adultery should be punished no whit less than the woman. ¶ I have heard tell of one of the greatest Princes of the earth that in the belief that his wife had cucko'd him with a certain gallant knight, he had him assassinated on the steps of his palace, & the lady after him. A little while before, at a tournament held among the courtiers, he had seen his wife gazing at her lover as he guided his horse to and fro, and saying to herself, 'Ah, my God, how well he spurs!' and answered, 'Aye, but he reaches too high,' whereat the lady was astonished; and but a little while later she was dead of poison, given her in perfumes, or by some other hidden agency.⁸

¶ I knew another high-born Gentleman who murdered his wife, a woman of great beauty and a pretty wit, by poisoning her *per naturam* (whereof

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she knew nothing, so subtle & well compounded was the poison) that he might marry a greater lady, the widow of an unhappy Prince. But as ill-luck would have it he never married her, being cheated and betrayed in the matter, and held in evil repute by all the ladies and gentleman of the Court into the bargain.

¶ I have heard certain Persons of consideration lay heavy blame upon our ancient kings, such as Louis Hutin and Charles le Bel, for having put their wives to death for their adulteries; the one Margaret, daughter of Robert Duke of Burgundy, & the other Blanche, daughter of Othelin of Burgundy, killing them most cruelly in the prisons of Chasteau-Gaillard. And Count Gaston de Foix did the same to Jeanne d'Arthoys. These Ladies were not guilty of such black crimes as were made out against them, but great Gentlemen are apt to fall out with their wives, and deal with them by some such pretty excuse, and then marry others.

¶ Upon a like charge King Henry of England condemned and beheaded his wife Ann Boleyn, in order to marry another, for he was much addicted to blood and a change of wives. Were it not far better to divorce them, as allowed by God's law, than to slay them so cruelly? But these gentlemen must have their fresh meat, and love to feast apart from their fellows, without bidding any guest to their tables; or else take new and second wives who will bring them fresh wealth after they have eaten up what they had of the first, or when they have not come by enough to satisfy them. Such a one was Baldwin King of Jerusalem, who made a tale of the lechery of his first wife, and put her away to take a daughter of the Duke of Melitia, thereby getting a large sum of silver in dowry, whereof he was in need, as is to be found written at length in the History of the Holy Land. So it suits these great Persons to amend the law of God and make it anew, to be rid of these poor women.

¶ King Louis le Jeune did no such harsh thing in the case of Leonor of Aquitaine, who was suspected of adultery, perhaps falsely, on her voyage from Syria, but simply divorced her, without further rigour or any advantage taken of this fine code which those others set up, a code invented

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and enforced by mere authority rather than by right and reason. By this moderation he earned a repute above those other Kings, and was given the title of Good, while they were all called by such names as Bad, Cruel & Tyrant; but he had in his soul some pangs of conscience even for this, whereby you may measure the goodness and Christianity of his life. Even the pagan Romans behaved often more like Christians than pagans, and in particular several of the Emperors, who were mostly cuckolds & their wives great lechers and whores; and though they were cruel enough by nature you may read again & again that they got rid of their wives by repudiation and divorce rather than by the slayings and murders common to us Christians.

¶ Julius Cæsar did nothing more than repudiate his wife Pompeia, who was mistress of P. Clodius, a handsome young Roman gentleman madly in love with her, and she with him. This youth availed himself of an occasion when she was sacrificing in her own home with other ladies only present, to dress himself as a girl (as he well could, being beardless) and mix among the others in the singing and playing of instruments; and by this device he was able to come to his mistress and have his will of her. Being discovered, he was driven out and brought to trial; but by the power of money and influence he was acquitted, and came to no further harm in the business. Cicero wasted his Latin in a fine oration which he made against him. It is true that Cæsar, wishing to make the world believe that he was sure of his wife's innocence, answered that he was not content that his bed should be cleared of this crime, but free of all suspicion. That was good enough for the world to swallow, but in his heart he well knew what it meant when his wife had been found with her lover. It is very possible that 'twas she who gave him this assignation & devised the means to it, for in this matter when the woman wills & desires such a thing, there is little need for the lover to worry himself with devising plans to attain it; she will hit on as many in an hour as we others in a century. Whereto a certain very famous Lady of my acquaintancesaid to her lover: 'Find but a way to make me desirous, and I will find a way for the rest.'

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Cæsar knew well enough the measure of such matters, for he was himself a great whoremaster, and was called the Cock-of-all-hens; and made a large number of cuckolds in his own city, witness the nickname which his soldiers gave him at his Triumph: *Romani, servate uxores: mœchum adducimus calvum*; ‘Romans, look to your wives, for we bring you the great Ravisher, Cæsar the Bald.’

That is how Cæsar, with a wise answer in this trial of his wife, saved himself from the name of Cuckold which he was so ready to give others; but in his heart he knew that he was hit.

¶ Octavius Cæsar divorced Scribonia for her lechery, without other action, although it is true she had plain reason to cuckold him, for the vast number of ladies he kept. He would even take them at table before their husbands, at the feasts which he gave, and hail them off to his chamber, where he enjoyed them and then sent them out again, with hair tumbled and ears flushed, a sure sign of the business (though I have never before heard of this as a sign—the cheeks, yes, but not the ears). He had, besides, the reputation of a great lecher, even Mark Antony reproached him with it, but he answered that he did not keep these ladies so much for his lusts as for the better discovery of their husbands’ secrets, whom he distrusted.

I have known more than one great Person who did likewise, seeking out ladies for a similar purpose, wherefrom he reaped a goodly harvest. I could name many such, if I would. ’Tis a pleasant stratagem, for it serves enjoyment double. The Cataline conspiracy was thus discovered by a lady of pleasure.

This same Octavius was at one time of a mind to condemn to death his daughter Julia, wife of Agrippa, because she played the whore very freely and brought disgrace upon him (for sometimes daughters shame their fathers worse than wives their husbands); but in the end he did no more than banish her, & forbid her wine and fine raiment & (for especial punishment) the intercourse of men—a sad punishment indeed for ladies of that condition.

¶ Cæsar Caligula, as cruel a tyrant as ever lived, suspecting that his wife

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Livia Hostilia⁹ had robbed him of some of his lawful delights and given them to her first husband C. Piso (from whom he had taken her by force), letting him have some few pleasures and sweetnesss of her fair body while the Emperor was away on a journey, used none of his accustomed cruelty in dealing with her, but banished her only, after he had had her but two years.

He did the same with Tullia Paulina, whom also he had taken from her husband, C. Memmius; sending her away from Court & no more, but with the express prohibition that she should continue this sweet practice in any wise whatsoever, even with her own husband—a cruel order indeed, that a woman may not give of her sweets even to her own husband! ¶ I have heard tell of a great Christian Prince who put this same ordinance upon a lady whom he protected, and bad her husband not so much as touch her, such was his jealousy of the unhappy man.

¶ Claudius also, son of Drusus Germanicus, only repudiated his wife Plautia Herculalina for all her remarkable lecheries, &, what was worse, for a double attempt upon his life; and although he was so notably cruel, & had two charges against her damning enough to bring her to the block, he was satisfied with a divorce.

Furthermore, consider how long he bore with the exercises and foul brothelries of Valleria Messalina, his other wife, who was not content to wanton with this man and that, but played the ready harlot and doled out her favours like any trollop of the town; and even, according to Juvenal, went so far as to slip away from her husband's bed, while he was asleep, to some public brothel, where she would pass in whatever disguise she could contrive, and give herself again and again, until she left the place not so much solaced as worn out. And she did worse even than this: for better satisfaction, and the joy she had in playing the whore and trollop, she priced her leaps and volleys and charged for them, like a pedlar or a hackney, to the last stiver.

¶ I have heard tell of a Lady of the Great World, a dear enough piece of merchandize, who led this life for a time, & went in like wise to brothels,

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to taste the manner of it and adventure her body; until it so happened that the Watch took her up one night on its round. And there is many another lady known to the world who plays such a game as this.

Boccace, in his book of *Famous Unfortunates*, speaks well of this Messalina, and makes excuse for her, saying that she was born to such a destiny, for on the day of her birth there were certain signs in the sky which kindled and predisposed these lusts in her, and in others besides. Her husband knew it and bore with it a long while, until he learnt that she had ado (and even gone through a ceremony of marriage) with a certain Caius Silius, one of the powerful men of Rome. Seeing in this a plot against his own life he had her executed, but on this score only and for none of her lechery, since he was used enough to that, seeing it, knowing it and putting up with it every day of his life.

Whosoever has seen the statue of this said Messalina, dug up a little while back in the city of Bordeaux, will acknowledge that she had the very feature for such a life. 'Tis an image of high antiquity, found among ruins, very beautiful, and well worth contemplation and good care. She is shewn as a fine woman, tall in stature, fair featured and prettily coiffed in the old Roman fashion, but more particularly tall & fine in body, thereby shewing and proving that she was what is said of her. For by what I learn from divers Philosophers, Physicians and Physiognomists, tall women are the more readily inclined to venery, since they are by so much nearer men, and partake of the warmth and humours of both man and woman; which, joined thus two together in one body & subject, are more violent and stronger than one alone. And just as a great ship must ride in deep waters, so (say these Doctors of the Art of Venus) a tall woman is more apt and proper for love than a little one.

¶ Whereupon there comes to my mind a recollection of a very high Prince whom I once knew. Wishing to praise a certain lady of whom he had had pleasure he said that: 'She is a very pretty whore, as fine as my lady mother'—whereat, suddenly made aware of the significance of his words, he added quickly that he had not intended to say that she was

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as fine a whore as his lady mother, but that she was of like feature and fine stature. Sometimes, indeed, a man says what he has no mind to say, and sometimes, moreover, he speaks without perceiving that the further he goes the better he serves truth.

But 'tis readily seen how tall and fine-built women are most proper for love, if 'twere for no more than the fair grace and majesty which they have about them: for in the matter of love this is no less necessary and admirable a virtue than in other actions and exercises—just as it is a hundred times pleasanter and more agreeable to ride a fine great charger than a little pony, and gives far more satisfaction to the horseman; 'though it is indeed needful that the horseman be a good one and hold himself well in the saddle, and both stronger and more skilful for that than for this. And 'tis the same with tall and fine-built women, for when they are of this stature they are apt to go with a more gallant stride than others, and not seldom lose their cavalier his stirrup, or even his saddle, if he is a poor horseman. I have heard tell of divers calcadors who endeavoured such mounts and got themselves mighty glory and merry mockery when they were thrown & fell flat; as, indeed, it is said of a certain lady of this town, who told her gallant frankly, the first time he lay with her, 'Hold fast, and grip me with every limb as well as may be, and carry yourself bravely, for I ride high, and would not have you thrown. And moreover, do not think to spare me: for I am strong enough & skilled enough to bear your riding, howsoever rough it be; or, if you spare me, I for my part shall not spare you. For good play takes a good partner' But the Lady won.

This tale shews the great need there is of a stout heart in dealings with such bold, joyous, sturdy, powerful and well-fashioned Ladies, and while 'tis true that their superabundant warmth and eagerness greatly contents their lovers, yet sometimes their eagerness over-reaches good proportion. And 'tis true also that, as the saying runs, there are *Good Harriers of every Size*, & likewise there are many little shrimps & pismires of ladies whose manner and grace in these undertakings is not much different from those others', or imitated therefrom, and who are as eager and greedy for the

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quarry, or greedier (I quote the Masters of these Arts), just as a little horse may be as frisky as a big one. On the other hand, as a wise man once said, woman is like divers animals, and more particularly a monkey when she is all the while frisking and wriggling in the bed.

I have made this digression as it came into my head: we must now return to our text.

¶ And cruel Nero also did no more than put away his wife Octavia, daughter of Claudius and Messalina, for her adultery, letting his cruelty stop at that.

¶ Domitian did even better, who divorced his wife Domitia Longina because she was besotted on a certain comedian and mountebank named Paris & did nought all day long but palliard with him, without any heed to her husband; but after a little while he thought better of it and took her back again. Perhaps the mountebank had taught her supple turns and expedients whereof he hoped to be the gainer.

¶ Pertinax did the same by his wife Flavia Sulpitiana; not that he divorced her, nor took her back again, but knowing that she was enamoured of a singer and player of instruments and had given herself to him, troubled himself not at all and let her continue in her way, and himself opened an amour with a certain Cornificia, his cousin german; following in that the opinion of Heliogabalus, who said that there is nought in the world so fair as the converse of kinsfolk and near relatives. I know of many who have made such exchanges, basing themselves upon these opinions.

¶ Likewise the Emperor Severus would not trouble himself about his wife's honour, though she played the whore publicly, saying that she was called Juha and must be excused on that account, since all of that name, from the earliest times, were apt to be great whores and cuckold their husbands. As to this I know a goodly number of ladies who bear certain of our Christian names (which I will not particularize, for the respect I owe our holy religion) who are customarily inclined to lechery, and quicker put to gallop than others who bear other names, whereof I have seen but few indeed escape.

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But I should never be done if I were to tell the vast number of Roman Empresses and Great Ladies of olden time, whose cucko'd husbands, though cruel, made no use of their cruelty, authority & privilege against them, even the most dissolute. And, believe me, the ladies of that age were no prudes, as the accounts of their lives makes clear, & their medals and effigies also, wherein you may see the same lubricity painted and engraved upon their beautiful features; yet their cruel husbands forgave them & put none of them to death, or but a few. And consider that those Heathens who knew not God were so compassionate towards their wives and humankind, while the most part of our Kings, Princes, Lords and other Christians are so cruel to them and exact such dire penalty!

¶ Nevertheless we cannot but praise our gallant King Philippe Auguste, who divorced his second wife Angerberge, sister of King Canute of Denmark, on the pretext that she was his cousin german by his first wife Ysabel (others say that he suspected a love affair), & then took her back again, driven to it by ecclesiastical censure—although in the meantime married to a third wife—and fetched her home behind him on horseback & without waiting for the Assembly of Soissons, which had been called to consider the matter and was still deliberating it.

In these present days our Princes do no such thing; but the easiest punishment they give their wives is to put them into solitary confinement, on bread & water, & there do them to death, by poison or violence, either with their own hand or through a court of justice. If they are so anxious to have done with them and marry others (as often happens) why do they not divorce them and be rid of them honestly, without further wrong? getting powers from the Pope to marry again, which they well can, although man should not separate those whom God hath joined. Yet even of late we have had a few good examples, such as our own Kings Charles VIII and Louis XII.

On this head I have heard a discourse by a great theologian, respecting the late King Philip of Spain, who married by dispensation his own niece, mother of the present King. 'Either,' said he, 'we must acknowledge

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the Pope in all things God's lieutenant on earth, & absolute, or else not: if he is so, as we Catholics must believe, we must indeed confess his power to be absolute and infinite, without earthly bounds, and able therefore to join and separate as he best pleases; but if it be held that he is other than absolute, I leave that opinion to those who deal in such errors, not to good Catholics.' In this way our Holy Father has the remedy of dissolution for such marriages, and for the differences which come between husband and wife in these evil matches.

These Ladies for certain are most blameworthy thus to break their vows to their husbands which they made before God; but, on the other hand, God has roundly forbidden murder, and in no matter what circumstance it is odious to him. And I have seldom seen bloodthirsty men and murderers (even of their wives) who have not paid for it, & few amateurs of blood come to a good end; whereas many an erring woman has found grace and forgiveness from God, from the Magdalen onward.

And in fine, these poor women are creatures nearer divinity than we others, by reason of their beauty; for the beautiful is nearer God (who is all beautiful) than the foul, which is properly the Devil's.

¶ The great King Alphonso of Naples used to say that beauty was a true sign of a fair life, as a lovely blossom of fair fruit. And in truth I have known many beautiful women who have been altogether good, and, although they played at love, did no harm to anyone, nor thought of other things than its sweet pleasure, putting their hearts in this & not meddling in other affairs.

Others I have known who were evil-livers, pernicious, dangerous, cruel and full of malice, and well enough able to concern themselves with both love and wickedness.

Can we say then that wives should be thus punished, when they are subject to the fickle and umbrageous humours of their husbands, who themselves merit God's punishment a hundred times more? For the behaviour of such men is as vexatious as is the trouble of writing about them.

of Gallant Ladies

¶ I speak now of another husband, a Lord of Dalmatia, who slew his wife's paramour, and then made her sleep night by night with the dead trunk while it rotted away, until the poor woman died of suffocation from the stench.

¶ You may read in the *Hundred Tales* of the Queen of Navarre a fair sad tale of this same sort, of that beautiful lady of Germany forced by her husband to drink regularly from her lover's skull, whom he had slain; whereof the Seigneur de Bernage, Charles VIII's ambassador to that country, was witness, and has given a pitiful account.

¶ The first time I was ever in Italy a tale was told me in Venice which passed for truth, of a certain chevalier of Albania who killed his wife's lover, whom he had taken in adultery with her. And, from the great despite which he felt inasmuch as his wife had not been satisfied with him (for he was a gallant knight, & proper for the service of Venus, in whose glory he would ride ten or twelve jousts in a night), he was bent on punishment, & to this end curiously sought out & hired from divers sources a dozen stout fellows and great lechers who were reputed to be well-membered and mighty executants, and crowded them into his wife's room, abandoning her to them (who was a very fair lady), bidding them do their duty, with double pay if they acquitted themselves well; and they so dealt with her one after another that they killed her thereby, to the great satisfaction of her husband, who reproached her as she was dying, saying that since she so fancied this pretty drink she should have her fill of it—as Semiramis™ said to Cyrus when she put his head in a jarful of blood. A terrible kind of death indeed!

This poor lady would not have died in this wise if she had been of the robust constitution of a certain wench in one of Cæsar's camps in Gaul, of whom it is said that two legions passed over her body in a short space of time, and who thereafter forthwith danced a jig, so little the worse did she feel.

¶ I have heard tell of a Frenchwoman, town-bred, damosel & very fair, who, at the sack of her town during our civil wars, had been ravished by

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a vast number of soldiers, and escaped therefrom, and enquired of her Father Confessor whether by this occurence she had greatly sinned. He told her no, since she had been taken by force and outraged against her will and in mislike of the business. She answered: 'Praise be to God then, that I have for once in my life had my fill without sin.'

¶ A certain fine lady, having been ravished in like wise at the massacre of S. Bartholemew and her husband killed, asked a wise and sober man whether she had thus offended against God, and would not be punished hereafter, & whether she had not wronged the *manes* of her husband just slain. He answered that if, while she was being thus handled, she took pleasure in it, she had sinned for certain, but if she disliked it, 'twas of no account. A fine judgment!

¶ I once knew very well a lady who differed from this opinion, saying that she never had such pleasure in the matter as when she was half-ravished and taken by force, even by a very powerful lover, since with rebellion and refusal the struggle grows more ardent; for once the breach is made the lover triumphs the fiercer in his victory, and with this the appetite of his lady grows also, until for very pleasure she seems half dead & fainted away, but 'tis only the delight she has of it. This lady told me that oftentimes she even played the game with her husband, feigning caprice, outraged modesty and disdain, to increase his desire; and with achievement they both found a hundred times the more satisfaction: for, as has often been written, that lady pleases more who is difficult of conquest than she who lets herself be thrown without waiting. Likewise in war, a victory won by force of arms carries greater glory than an easy surrender, and is more honoured. But, on the other hand, a lady should not be too intrac-table or cantankerous, or she will be taken rather for a cunning whore playing the prude than for an honest woman, to her great despite: in this I but repeat what I have been told by ladies very learned and skilful in these acts, & therein place my authority, for I would not be so presumptuous as to give them instruction on my own account in that which they understand so much better than I.

of Gallant Ladies

¶ I have known many who blamed those jealous & murderous husbands for one thing in particular; to wit, that if their wives are whores, 'tis they who made them so. For as S. Augustine said, 'tis foolishness in a husband to require chastity of his wife when he himself is deep in the slough of lechery; and he should expect of her but that which he is himself. We even find it written in our holy Scriptures that there is no need for husband and wife to be so mightily in love—that is, lascivious and fleshly love—since, by putting all their heart into such pleasures & giving themselves up to them so often & so earnestly, they let slip the love they owe to God: as I myself have seen with many women who love their husbands very fondly, and they them, and are so enflamed of each other that they forget the service of God; for the time that they should give to it they spend upon their own amours.

What is worse is that these husbands teach their wives, in their own marriage-bed, a thousand lubricities, turns, counter-turns, new fashions and other lecheries, and essay those monstrous devices of Aretino; with the consequence that for one little flame that was in their bodies they generate a hundred, & turn them into such famous lechers that 'tis scarce to be wondered that with such initiation they are apt to look beyond their husbands and go and seek other cavaliers. Whereupon the husbands are aggrieved, & punish the poor women; but in this they do wrong, for since those ladies feel themselves so expert they must needs desire to shew others what they can do. Their husbands would have them hide their learning, but 'tis neither sense nor reason; any more than if a good horseman had a well-trained horse, of noble mien and movement, he should permit none to see it trot, nor mount it, but ask them to take his word alone, and buy it on the strength of that.

¶ I have heard it said of a certain gallant gentleman of the Great World, who was enamoured of a fair lady, & told by a friend that he was wasting his time in that quarter, since she loved her husband too well, that he contrived on one occasion to make a hole in the wall of their chamber, so that he could watch them a-bed; whereupon he beheld every sort of

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lubricity, palliardize, postures and monstrous devices, as much indeed, or more, in the lady than in her husband, and with extremity of ardour; and on the morrow sought out his friend and told him of this merry spectacle, saying: 'The lady is mine as soon as her husband shall be gone on some journey; for she will never be able to contain the desires which nature and art have given her, but must find another playfellow, and with perseverance it may well be I.'

¶ I knew another worthy gentleman, in love with a fair and honest lady, who learnt that she had a figure of Aretino in her closet, which her husband had seen & allowed, & guessed thereby that she was to be captured; and without losing heart he served her so faithfully and well that at last he carried her away, and discovered in her great skill and learning, got from her husband or others, 'though she denied that any had first taught her these things save Lady Nature, who was a better mistress than any artifice. Nevertheless books and other devices had served her well, as she confessed to him later.

¶ You may read in the chronicles of ancient Rome of a great courtesan and signal procuress of that time named Elephantis, who contrived such figures as Aretino's, but worse, which were studied as a text-book by the great ladies & princesses who practised gallantry. And there was that excellent courtesan of Cyrene, who was surnamed *Of the Twelve Inventions*, since she had hit upon twelve new ways to multiply the delights of Venery.

¶ Heliogabalus engaged and kept in his service, by money and gifts, such as could contribute to his palliardize by new inventions and devices. And I have heard of like cases in other lands.

¶ Not long ago Pope Sixtus V caused to be hanged a certain secretary of the Cardinal d'Este named Capella, for divers crimes, but among others because he had composed a book of these fine figures, wherein were portrayed a Great Personage (who shall be nameless out of respect for his cloth)" and one of the fair ladies of Rome, very lifelike and well drawn.

¶ I knew a certain high Prince who did better, for he bought of a gold-

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smith a very beautiful cup in silver-gilt, so richly devised, engraved and sigillated as can be imagined, in fact a masterpiece and great treasure, whereon were finely wrought and tooled divers figures of Aretino, man and woman, round about the bottom of the bowl, and others on the upper part of the different fashions of the beasts, whence I first learnt (for I have often seen this said cup, and drunk from it, not without merriment) the coupling of lions, which is quite different from that of other animals, though I never knew it before and now defer before those who know it without my telling them. This cup was the chiefest ornament of this Prince's table, for, as I have said, 'twas a very fine and rich work of art, a delight to the eye within and without.

When this Prince entertained the ladies and maids of his Court, as he often did, his pages were ordered without fail to give them this cup to drink from, and those who had never seen it before would be struck with astonishment, either while drinking or after, and know not what to say; some would be filled with shame, and blush; others whispered among themselves: 'What is that inside there? 'Tis some ribaldry or other. I shall drink no further. Indeed, I should be half-dead of thirst before I would drink therein again.' But that was where they must drink, or else go without, and so some drank with shut eyes, and others, less shamefast, with them open. Those ladies and maids who knew something of the matter began laughing to themselves, others burst out aloud.

When asked what they had seen to make them laugh so, some would say that they had seen nought but some pictures which in no wise hindered their drinking. Others said: 'I, for one, see no harm in it, sight and what it sees cannot smirch the soul.' Others: 'Good wine is as good herein as elsewhere.' Others again vowed that 'twas as pleasant to drink in this cup as another, and as quenching. Some were rallied on why they did not shut their eyes while they drank; to which they answered that they wished to see what they were drinking, lest it should not be wine at all, but some physick or poison. Others were asked which pleased most, what they drank or what they saw; they answered, 'Both.' Some said, 'What

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pretty grotesques;’ others, ‘What pleasant mummeries;’ others, ‘What beautiful pictures;’ others, ‘What fair looking-glasses.’ Some said, ‘The goldsmith must have been short of occupation to have spent his time in devising such nonsense;’ others, ‘And you still more, Sir, to have bought such a pretty goblet.’ Some were asked if they felt no prickings about the body; they answered that these were but pictures, and without that happy power. Others were asked if they had not found the wine hot to drink, and if it had not warmed them, though it was winter time; they answered that they had taken care of that, for they had drunk cool, and found it refreshing. Some were asked which of the pictures they would liefast have in their bedchambers; they answered that they were fast in the cup and must stay there.

In short, I have heard a hundred thousand jests and quips tossed about between the Gentlemen and Ladies at this table, which was a very merry entertainment, a thing to see and hear; but best of all, to my mind, was to watch innocent maids (or such as feigned innocence) and other newcomers, trying to keep countenance, and laughing with the tips of their noses and lips, or else with a straight face and playing the hypocrite, as many ladies did. And you must know that although they might be fairly dying of thirst the pages durst give them no other cup or glass to drink from. And moreover several vowed, to save their faces, that they would never again attend these entertainments; but for all that continued to come, and often, for this Prince was very lavish and a master-epicure. Others said when they were invited that they would go, but under protest, that they should not be given this cup; and when they were at table they would drink from it more than ever. In the end they got over their scruples about drinking therefrom, and did even better, for in proper time and place they cast back their minds to what they had seen in it, and not a few entered upon the merry paths of love through this instruction and its essay, for a person of spirit will essay everything.

So much for the effects of this fair cup and its story. Whereto it is not hard to imagine the divers conversations, di eams, gestures & observations

of Gallant Ladies

which these ladies said and did thereafter among themselves, alone or in company.

I think this cup must have been of a different metal from that whereof Master Ronsard speaks in one of his earliest odes, dedicated to the late King Henry, which begins thus:

*As he that taketh down
A cup fair to behold
And pours to every one
Wine, that laughs i' the gold.*

But in this cup the wine did not laugh to the company, but the company to the wine; for some drank laughing, and others drank ravished with delight, and were hard put to it to contain themselves.

In short, this cup had terrible effects, so penetrant were its designs, figures & perspectives: which puts me in mind of how once in the gallery of the Count of Chasteau-Vilain, surnamed d'Adjacet, a certain company of Ladies with their Gallants had come to see this fine house, and had halted before the rare and beautiful pictures in this said gallery. There was one very gracious picture, wherein were portrayed many fair naked ladies disporting themselves, with many caresses, frications and interminglings, and all with so sweet and dainty an air that a very anchorite would have been stirred & warmed by it; wherefore a certain great lady, whom I knew a little myself and more by repute, carried away by these pictures, turned upon her gallant as if enraged by this rage of amorousness and said: 'Tis too much; bring my carriage and let us go to my house, for I can support this desire no longer; 'tis flaming over-high, and must be put out;' and so departed with her lover to seek that gentle liquor which is sweetest drunk without sugar, and whereof her lover was able to find her a little flagon.

Such paintings and pictures as these do more harm to a frail mind than might be supposed; as one in that same house, of a naked Venus, lying watched over by her son Cupid; another of Mars lying with his

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Venus; another of a Læda lying with her Swan. Many others there are, there and elsewhere, which are something more modestly painted and veiled than the figures of Aretino; but 'tis all one, and not far removed from that cup I spoke of, which has some likeness, by contraries, with the cup that Renault of Montaubon found in Ariosto's castle, which roundly discovered unhappy cuckolds, whereas this one prompts them. But that cup made somewhat too great a scandal with cuckolds & their unfaithful wives, while this makes none.

Nowadays there is no more need of such books or pictures, for husbands do enough teaching themselves; and therein lies the use of this schooling of husbands.

¶ I once knew a worthy Venetian printer in Paris, named Messer Bernardo," related to the great Aldus Manutius of Venice, with a shop in the *Rue de Saint-Jacques*, who assured me that in less than a year he had sold more than fifty sets of Aretino's books to many persons both married and unmarried, and to divers Ladies, whereof he named three of high rank and dignity (whom I shall not name) who had fetched them away themselves, in fine bindings, making him promise under oath to tell no one, 'though he told me nevertheless. And moreover he said that a little while later another lady came to ask if he had any such books as she had seen in the hands of these three, to which he replied: *Signora, sì, e peggio*, 'Aye, and worse;' whereupon suddenly a great flood of money, and the whole number bought for their weight in gold. That, by your leave, was a mad curiosity to send her husband seeking for what he could find at *Cornette*, near *Civita-Vecchia*.

All these forms and postures are hateful to God, whereto S. Hierosmo said: 'Whosoever loves his wife lewdly and not as a husband is an adulterer and sinner.' And since divers doctors of divinity have touched upon this, I will add this one word in Latin, which they themselves have been loath to put into the vulgar tongue: *Excessus*, they say, *conjugum fit, quando uxor cognoscitur ante retro stando, sedende in latere, et mulier super virum*.

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As also a little *quodlibet* I once read:

*In prato viridi monialem ludere vidi
Cum monacho leviter, ille sub, illa super.*

Some say that when they contrive things otherwise the woman cannot conceive. But certain women say that they conceive more readily in strange and unnatural forms than in natural and common ones, since they take greater pleasure in it, and, as the poet says, *more canino*, an odious business (although pregnant women sometimes follow this fashion for fear of injury).

Other learned men say that any form is good, so long as *semen ejaculetur in matricem mulieris, & quomodocunque uxor cognoscatur, si vir ejaculetur semen in matricem, non est peccatum mortale*.

You will find the whole matter discussed in *Summa Benedicti*, composed by a learned Cordelier¹ who has writ very cunningly of all kinds of Sin, and shews that he has both seen and read a great deal. Whoever reads the passage will find much therein concerning conjugal vices. Furthermore he says: *quando mulier est ita pinguis ut non possit aliter coire*, but by such forms, *non est peccatum mortale, modo vir ejaculetur semen in vas naturale*. Others say that 'twere better husbands should keep apart from their wives when they are pregnant, as do animals, than sully the marriage-bed with such monstrous performance.

¶ I knew a famous courtesan in Rome, called *la Greca*, whom a great French noble had maintained in that city. Some time later she took the fancy for a journey into France, through the offices of a certain Master Bonvisi, a rich Luccan, and banker at Lyons, who was enamoured of her. While she was there she made many enquiries concerning this gentleman and his wife, and among others whether she did not cuckold him, 'for,' said she, 'since I trained her husband so well and taught him such gallant lessons, he will doubtless pass them on to his wife in his dealings with her and 'tis not possible that she will never have been pricked to pass them on again to another; for our practice is so hot, when 'tis well learned, that

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there is a hundred times more pleasure in following it with several than with one alone.' And she considered moreover that this lady should give her her thanks and a fine present as salary for her trouble, because when her husband first came to her school he knew nothing at all, and was the dullest and greenest apprentice to the business that ever she saw; but she had so trimmed & fashioned him that his lady should find him improved a hundredfold. And, in fact, the lady, wishing to see her, called upon her in a disguise; which the courtesan saw through without difficulty, and told her all that I have here set down, and worse beside, and lewder, for she was a remarkably lewd courtesan. Thus do husbands contrive halters for their own necks; that is to say, horns for their heads. Thus God punishes them for abusing the holy joys of marriage. And yet they would have vengeance on their wives when they are unfaithful, though themselves a hundred times more to blame than they. And indeed it no way surprises me that this holy Doctor should call marriage itself almost adultery, at least when it is abused in such ways as I have described.

Therefore has marriage been forbidden our priests; for coming straight from their wives and the pleasures of the bed they are in no wise fit to approach the holy altar. For, by my faith, some men wanton worse with their wives than do bullies with their wenches; for these are fearful of taking some ill & do not waim to the business as do husbands with their wives, who are wholesome and carry no such dangers—or at least some, though not all, for I have known many who have both given to & taken from their own husbands.

Husbands who thus play at lechery with their wives are very blameworthy, as I have heard more than one Doctor maintain; not dealing modestly a-bed with them as they should, but gaming as with concubines; seeing that marriage was instituted but for the necessity of procreation, and not for disorderly pleasure and palliardize. The Emperor Sejanus Commodus,¹⁴ otherwise Anchus Verus, shewed this forth when he said to his wife Domitia Calvilla, who complained that he gave to courtesans and others what should have been hers and robbed her of little

pleasures and particularities: 'Be content, wife,' said he, 'that I quench my lusts with others, for the name of wife and consort is a name of dignity and honour, and not of pleasure and palliardize.' I have never been able to find out what reply his lady wife & Empress gave to that; but there can be small doubt that she was but little contented by this fine gilded pronouncement, & that she answered with a good heart, & for the majority (or even the whole) of married women: 'Fie upon such honour! and let us have pleasure—we thrive better on this than that.'

There can be little doubt either that the most part of married men, of our own time or any other, who have pretty wives, would tell a different tale, for they do not marry and yoke themselves, nor take wives, unless they intend to enjoy them and make love as it pleases them, and teach them skill of body, & amorous conversation, so that their sleeping Venus may be awaked and excited; and after they are well trained, if they go elsewhere, they are punished, beaten, bludgeoned and put to death.

There is little enough sense in that; 'tis as if a man had ravished a poor maid from out her mother's arms, & stolen her honour & her virginity, and then, having had his will of her, beat her and forced her to live otherwise, in all chastity: by my faith! 'tis no more nor less. Who would not condemn such a man as senseless, and worth a thrashing? You may say the same of many husbands, who, when all is done, do worse debauch their wives and persuade them to lechery than their own lovers (for they have more time and leisure than lovers); and when they are tired of such exercise their wives must needs change hands & masters, like good horse-men, who enjoy riding a hundred times more than those who know nothing of the art. 'And unhappily,' said this same courtesan of whom I spoke just now, 'there is no trade in the world so insidious nor so tireless as that of Venus.' Wherefrom these husbands should learn not to instruct their wives in this manner, for 'tis against their own interest; or else, if they find their wives playing tricks upon them, they should withhold punishment, since 'twas they who shewed the way.

¶ Here I must make a digression concerning a certain fair, honest and

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witty married lady (whom I know), who gave herself to a gallant gentleman, less from love than jealousy of another lady whom this gentleman protected. Wherefore at the moment of his enjoyment of her the lady said to him: 'In this moment, to my great joy, do I triumph over you and the love you bear to such-a-one.' The gentleman answered: 'One who is thrown down, subject and trampled under, can scarce call it a triumph.' Upon this answer she took thought, as one touching her honour, and answered: 'You are right.' And suddenly she contrived to unhorse her man and slipped from under him, and quickly turned the tables on him, mounting saddle herself. Never was Roman horseman or man-at-arms quicker or more dexterous at bestriding a fractious horse than this lady in her play, and she handled him in like manner, saying, 'Now, then, I can truly say I triumph, since I have you under my rein.' A lady of a pretty ambition, indeed, and a strange way of behaviour!

¶ I have heard tell of a very fair and honest lady of the world mightily given to love and lubricity, who was nevertheless arrogant and proud, and so high-spirited that when she came to the lists she would never suffer her man to throw her, thinking that it touched her dignity and was a cowardly station to be thus subject, as though beaten and enslaved in combat, but would always keep the upper hand and pre-eminence. And what helped her in this was that she would never give herself to a greater than she, lest he should use his power and authority to lay down the law, and turn or guide her as he pleased; but chose always her equals or inferiors, whose rank and station in the combat of love she ordered as a sergeant-major orders his men in battle, and bade them obey her faithfully under penalty of losing their play, some her love and others their very life; so that in all her ways, whether sitting, standing or lying, they were never able to put the smallest humiliation upon her, nor submission nor inclination, but she gave them as good as she got. I refer the matter to the discussion and judgment of those who have dealt more particularly with such amours, forms and stances.

This lady was easily able so to order matters that there was no slight

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put upon her fancied honour, nor her pride offended; for from what I have heard of such matters, there is no lack of means to such ordinance and practice.

That is indeed a terrible & amusing fancy for a woman, & a singular scruple of her pride. Nevertheless she had some justification; for 'tis a sorry thing to be subject, bent, trampled on, and the like, when you turn aside and think to yourself: 'So-and-so threw me down and trampled on me,' in a manner of speaking, if not with his feet, yet otherwise, which is saying as much.

This same lady would never allow these her inferiors to kiss her on the mouth; 'forasmuch,' said she, 'as the touch of mouth on mouth is the finest & most precious of all contacts, either of hands or other members,' and for this reason would not make herself over in this way, nor feel the touch on hers of lips which were base, common or nonpareil with her own.

¶ As to this there is another question which I have seen treated of by some writers: Which has the greater glory and advantage over his fellow, the man or the woman, in these venereal skirmishes and conquests?

The man gives out the foregoing as his claim; that the victory is greater for him who holds his sweet enemy vanquished beneath him, & subjects, rules & tames her at his ease and as best pleases him; for when the time is come there is never so great a Lady nor Princess but must suffer the law and domination which Venus has laid down in her statutes, though it be with an inferior; wherefore the man has the greater honour and glory.

The woman says: 'Aye, 'tis admitted: you must feel yourself a fine lusty fellow when you have me vanquished beneath you; but what if 'tis but a matter of carrying a rider? When he pleases me I carry him only for love and a joyous fancy of mine own, and not by constraint. Moreover, if this rider displease me I use him like a serf or a galley-slave, or, rather, I keep you under collar like a very cart-horse, and you must needs labour, strain, sweat and blow, and make such curvets and efforts as I will have of you. And meanwhile I lie at my ease and watch you

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labour; and sometimes I laugh at you and take my entertainment in observing your endeavours; or sometimes pity you, according to my mood and fancy; and when I have had enough of it I leave my gallant weary, spent, weak, worn out and fit for nothing more, save a good rest & something to eat, a jelly, a little pick-me-up or some nice nourishing soup. But I, I feel nothing of all this labour and curvetting, but only very well contented at your expense, Master Gallant, & in need of nothing more, except of some other rider who will give me the same again, so that I may leave him spent as I have left you; and thus without ever surrendering myself, I make my dear enemy surrender to me, and so carry away the true honours and glory; for in a duel 'tis he who gives in that is the loser, not he who fights on as long as life lasts.'

Thus I have heard it told of a fair and honest lady that once when her husband waked her from deep sleep for his pleasure she said to him after all was done: 'Twas your bout, not mine. And contriving to get the upper station she instantly bound him fast, with arms, hands, feet and twined limbs, saying: 'I shall teach you to wake me another time;' and put forth all her strength to shake, teaze and wrestle with her husband, who was firm held under and could no way escape, but sweated, panted, groaned, and cried mercy, and so played him the trick a second time over in his despite, and left him so weary, spent and prostrate that he vowed roundly another time to wait upon her humour and appetite. This tale, methinks, is better imagined than written down.

These, then, are the lady's claims in this matter, with others which she might advance if she would. And if to this the man answers that his bedfellow is but the vessel and receptacle wherein he casts that which he no longer wants (if good human seed sown in the joy of marriage or wantonness can be so designated), she may very well answer: 'Aye, but no sooner is this good seed sown (which at other times you declare to be the very distillation and quintessence of your best blood) than I go and cast it forth again, & that in a very base & unhandsome manner. For whether 'tis five hundred bouts I have of you, or a thousand, or two, or three

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thousand, or a very infinity, or none at all, I keep but one sowing; and then the seed is fairly lodged & housed, but other wise 'tis given very mean quarters, as I have said. Thus there is no occasion to boast of your casting away; for unless we conceive thereof we do the same without delay, so soon as we have enjoyed the sweet taste of what you gave us, saying: So much for your good broth, Master Cook, it has lost its pleasant savour. And mind you, the veriest baggage can say as much to the greatest King or Prince, which is a mighty liberty, seeing in what respect men hold the blood royal. Truly a pretty treatment for such precious stuff !'

So much for Woman's argument; and 'tis indeed a mighty liberty she speaks of. And this brings to my mind a certain noble Lord, who goes to the other extreme in this matter, & if by chance he loses some few drops of seed in a dream has his sheets buried with all requisite ceremony, saying that 'tis a little dead child of his line which by mischance and ill-fortune was never conceived.

But in this he is by every probability mistaken; for of the thousand times a man lies with his wife in a year 'tis possible, as I say, that she will not conceive at all, nor ever in her life, as with some women who are barren and sterile. Hence has sprung the error, maintained by divers evil livers, that marriage was instituted not so much for generation as for pleasure; which is both ill-understood and ill-spoken, for although a woman does not conceive whenever she has occasion, yet 'tis so by some operation of God's will, hidden from us, who chooses thus to punish husband & wife both; seeing that the greatest blessing God can grant us in marriage is fair issue, not concubinage. Some ladies delight in having children of their lovers; others not at all, and will not allow them to sow seed in their bodies, either that there may be no need to pass off children on their husbands which are not theirs, or from a belief that they neither wrong nor cuckoo them so long as no seed is sown, just as a queasy stomach cannot take hurt from the mere mouthing of unwholesome or indigestible dainties, chewed once or twice and then spat out again. For this very name of cuckoo, which is properly that of those pretty April

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birds who lay their eggs in others' nests, is given to men by contraries when others come to lay in theirs, that is, to sow their seed in their wives' bodies and leave them with children therefrom.

That is how some wives think to keep in the right toward their husbands, having their fill of lovers' sports but receiving no strange seed, and thus being mighty conscientious; as a certain great Lady I have heard tell of, who said to her Gallant: 'Sport with me as much as you will, & give me pleasure, but (as you value your life) see that nought comes of it, or 'twill be the worse for you.' So that he must needs be prudent, and watch the sea for the tides, as the saying is.

¶ I have heard a like tale from the Chevalier de Sanzay, a very brave and gallant gentleman of Brittany, who would have been a famous sea captain if death had not cut him off short, as indeed he had already begun to shew himself, & carried the marks of it already, having lost an arm by cannon-shot in a sea fight. By great misfortune he was captured by pirates and taken to *Algiers* as a slave. His master was high-priest of the Mosque in that city, and had a very fair wife who grew so hot upon the said Sanzay that she bid him to Venery with her and generously entreated him, better than any other of her slaves; but above all she expressly ordered him, under penalty of death or strait confinement, not to sow one jot of seed in her body, since, said she, she was in no mind to be tainted and polluted with Christian blood, which would be a mortal sin against her law and the Prophet Mahomet, and moreover ordered that 'though she called on him in her delight & passion a hundred times to stake all on the throw he was on no account to obey her, since 'twould be only from the great pleasure which ravished her senses from her, & not of her own true will.

The said Sanzay, albeit a Christian, shut his eyes to this offence against his own law, for the love of greater liberty & good treatment; for a poor slave roughly handled and miserably chained may well forget such things at times. He obeyed the lady's orders, and was so prudent and so faithful to her instruction that he pleased her mightily, and ground well & often in his lady's mill, without raising the sluices; whereat she loved him all

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the more, for his abstinence and strict obedience; and 'though she cried to him and gave him every permission, yet would he not yield, since he was fearful of a thrashing in the Turkish manner, as he had seen done to his fellows.

That was a terrible whim of the lady; nevertheless it seems that they were prodigal in their exercise, and without hurt either to her Turkish soul, or his Christian, since nothing came of it; but he vowed to me he had never been put to so much trouble in all his life.

He also told me another tale (the most diverting possible) of a trick she played him; but since 'tis somewhat lewd I forbear to give it here, fearing to offend chaste ears.

This said Chanzay was afterwards ransomed by his relatives, a family of honour & much renown in *Brittany*, joined by blood with many Great Persons, as (for one) the High Constable, who was much attached to his elder brother and assisted in his ransom; whereafter he came back to Court and told Monsieur d'Estrozze and myself these and many other stories of his adventures.

¶ And now, what shall we say of those husbands who are not content to take their joy and merry pleasure with their wives, but must needs give an appetite for the same to their own friends and others? Thus I have known several who are for ever praising their wives, telling over their beauties, describing their members and bodies, giving accounts of the delights they have of them & their wanton sports, & make their friends kiss them, touch them, fondle them, even to shewing them naked.

What do such men deserve? aye, what better than to be cucko'd forth-with, as Gyges served Candaules King of *Lydia* by the device of his ring. For the foolish King had praised his wife's rare beauty to him (as though silence would have wronged her), & exposed her to him naked; whereat Gyges was so enamoured that he laid seige to her and took his fill, and afterwards slew her husband and seized his Kingdom. 'Tis said that the Queen was so angered at being thus shewn forth that she herself drove Gyges to it, saying: 'Either he who brought this to pass must die at thy

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hand; or else thou, who hast seen my nakedness, at the hand of another.' This King, in good truth, must have been short of occupation to pass his time in this foolish wise, instilling appetite in another for this pretty dainty which he should have held so close and dear.

¶ Louis Duke of Orleans (a great debaucher of the ladies of the Court, & always the noblest) who was killed at the Barbet Gate, in Paris, did just the contrary to this; for once when he had a very fair & honest lady lying with him & her husband came to his chamber to bid him good-morrow, he screened the lady's head with a sheet, & discovered all her body, bidding the gentleman her husband observe her naked and touch her if he would, but expressly ordering him (as he valued his life) not to take the sheet from off her face nor otherwise discover it (which condition he did not dare disobey), asking him several times what he thought of this fair naked body: wherewithal the other was mighty pleased, and had great satisfaction of his observations; and finally took his leave of the Duke without ever knowing that 'twas his own wife.

If he had been better accustomed to see and observe her naked, as do other husbands I know of, he would perhaps have been readier to recognise her; whence you may see that 'tis no bad thing to be well acquainted with your wife's body, and faithfully explore it from time to time.

After her husband had gone she was questioned by M. d'Orleans: whether she had been alarmed? I leave you to imagine what she answered, and the great distress and anxiety in which she passed that quarter of an hour; for 'twould have needed but the smallest indiscretion, or the least disobedience from her husband in moving the sheet, and all would have been undone. That was true, said M. d'Orleans, but in that case he would instantly have killed him to prevent any mischief he might do her.

And the best of it was that when the husband was a-bed with his wife the next night he told her that M. d'Orleans had shewn him the fairest naked woman he had ever seen, but as for her face, he knew not what to say, because it had been forbidden him. I let you imagine what his wife thought to herself thereat. And 'tis said that of this great lady and M.

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d'Orleans was got that valiant Bastard of Orleans," the shield of France and scourge of England, whence is sprung the noble and stout-hearted race of the Earls of *Dunois*.

¶ But to come back again to our husbands who are prodigal of their wives' nakedness, I know one that shewed his wife to a friend who had come to see him one morning while he was dressing, lying asleep on her bed, and quite naked, having thrown back the sheets herself on account of the heat; & half-drew the curtain, so that the rising sun shone in upon her, and his friend could observe her as he pleased, wherein he saw nought but beauty, and that in perfection; and might feast his eyes, not as long as he would, indeed, but as long as he could; and then the husband and he went off to wait upon the King.

On the morrow the gentleman (who had long been in love with that lady) told her of the lovely vision which had been vouchsafed him, and described to her divers things he had observed in her fair body, even its hiddenest parts; and her husband confirmed this, and that 'twas he himself who drew the curtain. Whereat the lady, from the great despite she conceived against her husband, let go on this account only and gave to her lover that which all his devotion had not been able to win before.

¶ I knew a certain very noble Lord who was about to set out hunting one morning, and was visited in his chamber before rising by his gentlemen, and while he was lying with his wife, and she holding in her hand that which many ladies do for the love of their husbands, he suddenly flung off the bed-clothes with so little warning that she was surprized and half her body discovered; and to those who were present he said laughing: 'Well, Gentlemen, have I not shewn you divers hidden treasures?' Whereat she was so wroth that she willed him all the harm she could think of; which 'tis possible she has since found means to pay him.

¶ I know another tale of a Great Personage, who learnt that a certain of his friends was enamoured of his wife, and (either to whet his appetite, or from grief and despite at having so fair a wife and she not love him) he shewed her forth to him one morning when he came to visit him, as

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they were lying half-naked together in bed; and, what was worse, took his pleasure with her before his eyes, setting her to gallop as if they had been alone, and begged his friend to take good note besides, saying that he did this to honour him. I leave you to guess whether after this abuse of her modesty the lady took not the earliest chance that came to let her lover do likewise, & to the top of his bent, & whether he was not doubly willing to plant a pair of horns upon the wretched husband's head.

¶ I have heard of yet another, & a great nobleman at that, who dealt in like wise with his wife before the Prince his master, but 'twas at his especial request and command, for he was an amateur of such pleasures. Are not such men doubly to blame, who will first play the pander to their own wives, and then the hangman?

¶ A man should never shew forth the nakedness of his wife, nor his lands, towns nor territories, as I have heard said by a notable Captain with reference to the late M. de Savoye, who counselled & dissuaded our last King Henry from going through the town of *Milan* on his return from *Poland*, telling him that the King of Spain might take offence thereat: but 'twas for no such reason; he feared lest when the King was there, and observed its beauty, riches and magnitude, he should be taken with a desire to get it back again and hold it by good right and justice as his forefathers had. And that was the true reason, as a great Prince told me who had it from the late King, himself well enough aware of the objection. But to pleasure M. de Savoye & leave no complaint to the Spanish King he turned aside, although (as he honoured me by the information when he reached Lyons) he had heartily wished to see the place. Truly M. de Savoye was better Spaniard than Frenchman.

I hold also those husbands worthy of every obloquy who have had their own lives saved for them by the favour of their wives, and yet are ingrates enough to treat them harshly on a suspicion of other loves, even attempting their lives. I have heard of a Great Personage whose death was sworn by certain conspirators, & only turned aside by his wife's prayers, wherefor he nevertheless shamefully rewarded her & treated her with durance.

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¶ I have myself witnessed the following: A certain gentleman was put upon his trial for having signally failed in his duty on the battlefield and allowed his General to be slain without succour or any attempt to save him, and, despite a gift of twenty thousand crowns with which he hoped to save his head, was mighty nigh the scaffold when his wife at his own instance besought a mighty Prince and gave herself to him, and so with her beauty & sweet body bought back that which money could not buy; and got her husband his life and liberty. And thereafter he treated her as ill as he was able. Assuredly such cruel and senseless husbands are the lowest of wretches.

¶ Others I have known who, to their greater credit, did otherwise; recognizing their good fortune & whence it came, and honouring all their lives the sweet member which had so wrought for them.

¶ There is yet another sort of Cuckold, who is not content with having been haish in his lifetime, but must needs carry his angers with him to the point of death; whereof I myself know an exemplar who had a very fair and honest lady (though she had, it is true, studied at other schools besides her husband's) to whom he said upon his deathbed: Alas, my dear one, I am dying! And would to God you might keep me company into that other world! then death would be more to my liking. But the lady, who was still fair and but thirty-seven years old, was in no mind to travel with him upon that journey, nor play the fool after the fashion of Evadne, daughter of Mars & Thebe, of whom we read that she so loved her husband Capaneus that when his body was cast into the pyre she forthwith cast herself upon it and so, in her constancy and might of grief, was burnt and consumed with him, and accompanied him in death as in life.

¶ Alcestis did even more, for having learned of an oracle that her husband Admetus King of *Thessaly* must needs die unless his life were purchased by the death of a faithful friend, she slew herself forthwith and so saved her husband.

But in these latter days there are no such loving wives as this, who will

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go of their own free will into the grave before their husbands, nor after them. No, they are no longer to be found: the mothers that bred them are dead, as the Parisian horse-dealers say when no good horses are to be had.

And that is why I consider this aforesaid husband so ill-advised to invite his wife to death in this uncivil fashion, as if 'twere to some merry entertainment. It was a pretty jealousy which brought these words to his lips, thinking of the displeasure awaiting him below in Hell when he should see his own wife, whom he had trained so prettily, in the arms of a lover or some new husband.

Aye, a pretty jealousy took him thereafter, we may be sure, and at each new trick he vowed that if he could but return to earth he would no more endure from her what he had in past times. And yet while he lived he let her do as she pleased without hindrance.

¶ The excellent Tancred who wrought so valiantly in the Holy War, did quite otherwise; for when he wife was weeping at his deathbed, and the Earl of *Tripoly* beside her, he charged them both that they should wed after his death, which they did.

We may suppose that he had observed signs of love between them in his life time: for she may well have been as merry a gallant as her mother the Countess of *Anjou*, who was a while protected by the Earl of *Brittany* and came thence to the arms of King Philip of France and bore him this bastard daughter Cecily, Tancred's wife. But in truth this valiant Tancred deserved better than to be made cuckold.

¶ A certain gentleman of Albania, having been condemned to be hanged for some misdemeanour committed in the service of the French King, was about to be led out to his death when he begged indulgence to bid farewell to his wife, a very fair and very gracious lady. And as he was bidding her farewell and kissing her he suddenly bit off her nose with his teeth, severing it altogether from her pretty face. When the Judge questioned him upon this outrage, and why he had so treated his good wife, he answered that he had done it in righteous jealousy; 'forasmuch,' said

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he, 'as she is very beautiful, and I know well enough that no sooner am I dead than she will be sought out and debauched by some one of my fellows (since I know her for a pretty wanton) and incontinently forget me. Therefore I desire that after my death she shall have occasion to bear me in mind, and weep and grieve after me, if not on account of my death, then at least for her own misfortune; and that none of my fellows may have the pleasure of her which I have had.' A terrible jealousy, indeed. ¶ I have heard tell of other husbands who, when they felt themselves growing old, decrepit, halt, worn and nearing the grave, most basely and jealously encompassed the death of their ladies, even when those were yet young and fair.

And upon this matter of the cruel humours of such tyrant husbands and wife-killers I have heard a notable debate: Whether 'tis right and permissible for a lady who is advised aforehand of such cruelty and murder intended by her husband against her, or who suspects the same, to play the first throw without more ado, and for her own safety send him before her to the abodes of the other world?

I have heard it held, Yes, that she may certainly do this; not indeed according to the law of God, for all killing is thereby forbidden, as I have said already; but according to the world's way, well enough. The opinion is based upon the saying, *Better too soon than too late*; for indeed every man should have a care for his own life, seeing that God has given it to him, nor surrender it until God himself summon him by the hand of death. Otherwise, if he knows that his death is prepared against him, and takes no heed, nor flies it when he may, 'tis no better than self-destruction, which God abhors. Therefore 'tis better to send the intendant murderer as Ambassador in advance, & so avoid the blow, as did Blanche of Auverbruckt to her husband, the Lord of Flavy, Captain & Governor of *Compiègne*, who betrayed the Maid of Orleans to her death. This lady Blanche, having learnt that her husband was minded to have her drowned, forestalled him with the assistance of her barber, and first smothered & then strangled him; whereof she had her pardon from King Charles VII, who

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was perhaps not averse to the death of this gentleman for divers reasons. This tale may be found in the *Annals of France*, among those of *Guyenne*.

Of like mind & action was a certain Madame de la Boine, in the reign of Francis I, who brought an accusation against her husband and so rid herself of him by the arm of the law, charging him with divers crimes and misdemeanours, and getting him first imprisoned and then by further suits beheaded. I had this tale from my grandmother, who spoke of her as a very fair lady and of good birth. She was indeed quick to take Time by the forelock.

¶ Queen Joan the First of Naples did the same by the Infante of Majorca, her third husband, whom she caused to be beheaded for the reason I have given in another Discourse; but it may well be that she feared him and was minded to despatch him the first: wherein she was not wrong, nor any woman who does likewise when she has cause to suspect her gallant of such treachery.

I have heard tell of many a lady who bravely followed in this course, and saved herself by this means. And I have myself known one who was even surprized by her husband with a lover, and nothing said to either, but the good husband went heavily away & left her there with the lover, mighty disturbed and apprehensive of evil to come; whereupon she took counsel and said to herself: 'He said nothing, but I fear the more for some hidden revenge: if I were sure he intended my death I should take care that he should die the first.' Fortune was kind to her, however, for a little while later he died of his own accord; wherein he also was happy, since he would have known scant rest thereafter.

¶ There is yet another common matter for debate concerning these wild and angry husbands and cuckolds, that is to say: Which should they take vengeance upon, the wife or the lover?

There are some who say: Upon the woman only, basing their argument on the Italian proverb which says that *Morta la bestia, morta la rabbia o veneno*, and considering that their injuries are mollified when they have slain her who causes them their pain, just as they do who are bitten

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or stung by a scorpion (whereto the most sovereign remedy known is to take and burn the offender, and apply its ashes to the wound); and people of this opinion are accustomed to maintain that 'tis the wife who is most to blame and most deserving of punishment. I speak here more particularly of great ladies and those of high rank, and not of the smaller fry; for 'tis these great ladies who by their allurements, intimacies, commands and witty speech call the battle, and the men do no more than take up the challenge; and all are agreed that he who cries and declares war is more to blame than he who but accepts it. And 'tis held that for the most part lovers will not attempt these high and perilous positions unless they are first beckoned thereto by the ladies, who find means to signify their love in divers fashions; just as you will find that a strong frontier town is mighty hard to come at, either by force of arms or by surprize, unless there is some spy or traitor among the defence who will help you or hold out a welcoming hand.

Nevertheless, since women are somewhat more frail than men, it is fitting to forgive them and to understand that when they are once set on love in their hearts they must needs carry it through whatever the price, not content (or at least the most part) to let it brew within, and consume them little by little, until they become withered and listless, and so lose the blossom of their beauty. And this is their good reason for taking pleasure of their loves, and so to cure their ills, rather than die, as they say, of ferret's sickness.¹⁶

True, I have known many fair ladies of this habit, who have been quicker than their lovers to call the tournament, and for divers reasons: some because they were enflamed by the beauty or valour of the man; others for the sake of *dinari*; others to get pearls and jewels, cloth of gold & silver, wherein I have known some ladies who drove as hard a bargain as a merchant for his wares (and, as 'tis said, she who takes, sells); others again to get favour at Court; others to gain the favour of Lawyers and Justices, like several fair ladies of my acquaintance who had poor cases but won them by the exercise of their beauty and pretty members; and

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yet others who call men to love only for the sweet and soothing liquor they get of their bodies.

¶ I have known divers ladies so amorous of their gallants that they as good as pursued them by force, whereof everyone was greatly ashamed on their account.

I knew one very fair lady who was so enamoured of her noble lover that she wore his colours, as lovers are wont to wear the colours of their ladies. I would give the colours but for the great shame of such an exposure.

I knew another whose husband had insulted her lover at a Court entertainment; & while he was yet in the ballroom swaggering over his part in the affair, she went straightway and dressed herself as a man, and sought out her lover in her husband's despite, and forthwith took her pleasure with him, being so amorous that she near died of it.

¶ I knew a certain worthy gentleman, of no small standing at Court, who was minded to play the gallant to one of the fairest ladies of the day, especially as she had herself given him plenty of encouragement; but her high position caused him to respect her virtue and restrain his ardours, wherefore he was somewhat backward at beginning. The lady, however, had set her heart upon this gentleman and vowed that the die was cast and should lie at all hazards, wherefore she continued her allurements by every means in her power, saying to him among other pretty speeches: 'If you will not love me, suffer me at least to love you, and consider not my merits, but rather the great love and passion I bear you;' until at last she carried him by the weight of her addresses. And, indeed, what could the gentleman do then, but love her as she loved him, and serve her, and thereafter ask the salary and recompense of his service; which he duly received, for it is right that whoso serves should have his payment.

I could tell of a vast number of ladies who seek rather than are besought; and are for that reason more blameworthy than their lovers. For when they have once set their heart upon a man they neither faint nor retire until they have won their end, nor cease to draw him close by alluring glances, by their loveliness, by their pretty graces (which they study

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to turn about in a thousand different ways), by subtle cosmetics where, with to heighten their beauty, by fine ornaments and sumptuous hair-dressing, and by rich clothes, and above all by fond and half-lascivious speeches and wanton gestures and intimacies, and by gifts and trifles of all sorts. In this wise men are taken captive, and when they are so taken they must needs take their captor in turn, since this is the intention. And hence it is held that 'tis on the wives that vengeance should fall.

Others say that the credit should lie with the man, just as it does with those who lay seige to a town: for 'tis they who first call a parley, send the challenge, reconnoitre the position, first send out scouts and contrive gabionades & trenches, go first to the assault of the walls or the battering of the gates, and 'tis they who first offer terms of surrender. And so (say they) do lovers in like wise; for like bold & resolute soldiers they lay siege to the fortress of women's Virtue, and after all the forms and usages of a siege have been observed by the attackers, and the assaults delivered with importunity, those brave defenders are at last constrained to haul down their ensign and admit the sweet enemy into the fort. Wherein it seems to me that they are not so blameworthy as some would have us admit, for 'tis by no means so easy to keep up the defence against an obstinate siege without some loss of personnel. Thus I have known many lovers who by long service and great perseverance have enjoyed their mistresses, when at the beginning they would not so much as (so to speak) let them kiss their bottoms; teasing and constraining them to such a pitch that at last they gave themselves with tears in their eyes, just as at last one is brought to giving alms to Paris street-beggars, much more because of their importunity than for pity of them or love of God. Not a few women are won in this way, rather by obstinacy than by any awakening of love, and more particularly with lovers of great station, whom they fear to repel lest they do them some harm on account of it, and perhaps risk a greater scandal than would come of acquiescence, or some other affront or injury to their honour. I have known great inconvenience arise from such circumstances as these.

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That is good enough reason why these evil husbands, who are so fond of their wives' blood, should not be so prompt to act, but first make careful enquiry into the whole matter, however confusing that enquiry may be, or however much it may set them scratching their heads to unravel it, and although often enough they will have the misfortune to discover every possible occasion for their chagrin.

¶ I knew a certain great Prince of a foreign country who married a very fair & honest lady; but before long left her bed for that of another woman, who was by some accounted a courtesan and by some an honest woman whom he had debauched. But, not content with that, he used to bring her to lie with him in a low room beneath that of his wife, and directly under her bed; and when he was about to leap his mistress nothing would satisfy him but that by way of derision he must needs thump the ceiling twice or thrice and cry out: 'Your health, my wife.' This derision and insult lasted several days, and angered the lady mightily, as you may suppose, until at length in her anger & despair she sent for an honest gentleman of her acquaintance and said to him privily: 'Sir, I would have you enjoy me, and if you will not I know how to make it the worse for you;' whereto he, by no means averse to such an adventure, agreed willingly. And thus when next her husband had his mistress in his arms, & she her lover, and he cried out to her as before: 'Your health;' she answered in the same manner: 'And yours;' or else: 'I drink this to you, my friend.' These toasts and calls and merry answers, according as each disported himself with his paramour, continued for some while, until at length the Prince began to suspect something of the matter; and causing watch to be set upon his wife, found out that she was cuckoo'ing him very prettily, & drinking his health with as great derision as he drank hers. And when he had informed himself of the true state of affairs he forthwith turned the Comedy into Tragedy, and having a last time toasted her from below, and had her merry reply, he ran suddenly upstairs, forced the door, and straightway charged her with her crime. The lady answered him calmly: 'I know well enough what my life is worth: kill me quickly. I do not

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fear death, and I die with a glad heart, since I have revenged myself upon you, and made you cuckold, and set a fair pair of horns upon your head, as you gave me good occasion to do. But know this, that if you had not so treated me I should never have been false to you, inasmuch as I had vowed fidelity and would not have broken my vow for the dearest lovers in the world. You are not worth so true a wife as I. So kill me forthwith, but if there is any mercy in your heart I beg you spare this poor gentleman, who is not here of his own seeking, but because I summoned him & pressed him into my service for this design of vengeance.' The Prince was of a cruel nature, and slew them both, nevertheless, without heed to her words. But what else could that poor Princess do after the insults & degradations her husband had put upon her, save what (in despair, and careless of the world) she did? Some will accuse her rather than excuse; but much argument is possible upon that score.

¶ In the *Hundred Tales* of the Queen of Navarre there is a very beautiful story of a certain Queen of Naples, not unlike the foregoing, wherein like vengeance is taken upon the King her husband; but the ending is less unhappy.

¶ Well, let us take leave of such wrathful and devilish Cuckolds, and speak of them no more, for they are tiresome & poor company; & moreover I should never have done if I were to set down all I know of this unlovely subject. Let us rather speak for a while of those kindlier Cuckolds, who are good-humoured, easy company, most saintly patient, debonair, tractable, ready to close their eyes when necessary, & altogether good fellows.

Of these Cuckolds, some have their horns in advance, and know it before they are married; that is to say, their ladies, either as widows or as young girls, have already taken a first leap: others know nothing, but marry in good faith, either on the word of their brides, or of their fathers, mothers or other relatives and friends.

¶ I have known not a few men who have married brides whom they knew to have been enjoyed and ridden by divers Kings, Princes, great Nobles

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and other Gentlemen; and nevertheless wedded without scruple, being entranced by their loveliness, and by the riches, jewels and great wealth they had earned at their amorous trade. But I will speak first of the girls themselves.

¶ I have heard tell of the daughter of a mighty & sovereign Prince, who, being hot in love with a certain gentleman, & having tasted the first fruits of love, grew so greedy thereof that she held him prisoner in her chamber for a month together, feeding him with restoratives and nourishing soups, delicate meats and rescaldatives, the better to distil his essences and draw out his substance; and having served her first apprenticeship under him continued under his instruction as long as he lived, and under others also, & at the age of forty-five married a nobleman who found nothing to complain of, being even very pleased at the great match he was making."

¶ Boccaccio reports a proverb which ran in his day, that: *A kissed mouth* (others say *A swoven maid*) *is never the worse, but, like the moon, its youth is ever renewed*; and mentions this proverb in the course of a tale which he tells about a certain very fair daughter of a Sultan of Egypt, who passed under the spurs of nine different lovers, one after another, & in all more than three thousand times; and in the end was given in marriage to the King of *Garba* as a virgin, whereat he found nothing to complain of, being mightily pleased with her and never knowing that she was other than she had been at their first betrothal. The tale is a good one.

¶ A Prince once told me that among his like (though not always with very good will) such matters must needs pass readily enough, although the bride may have been through the hands and under the spurs of three or four riders before her marriage. He said this in speaking of a nobleman who was deep in love with a great lady somewhat above him in rank, who also loved him, but some obstacle arose to the marriage which they had thought to make together; whereupon this Prince asked: Whether he had leapt the pretty creature? And when it was answered: No, not as far as was known, he added that 'twas a pity, for so at least they would both have had joy of the affair, and no harm would have been done. For

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among great folk these rules and scruples concerning virginity are made little of, since in the arrangement of great alliances all such stickling must be passed over; and the good husbands are only too pleased to have their horns grown in advance.

¶ When King Charles made the tour of his Kingdom there was left of him in a certain town which I could name, a little girl whereof the daughter of a certain famous house⁸ had just been delivered, who was put out to be brought up by a poor woman of the place, with an advance of two hundred crowns for her lodging. The poor woman fed her and brought her up so well that at the end of fifteen years she was a great beauty & forthwith gave herself to a lover; for her mother paid no more heed to her, but four months after the birth married a very great personage. Aye, I have known many who care nothing for such things.

¶ While I was in Spain I once heard tell of a great and noble lord of *Andalusia* who married the sister of another great noble, and at the end of the third day from the consummation of the marriage her brother said to him: *Señor hermano, agora que soys casado con my hermano, y l'haveys bien godida solo, yo le hago saber que siendo hija, tal y tal gozaron d'ella. De lo pasado no tengo cuydado, que poca cosa es. Del futuro guardate, que mas y mucho a vos toca.* As much as to say that what is done is done and no more need be said, but that as to the future, beware, for that touches a man's honour more nearly than the past.

There are some who are of this mind, and consider that 'tis of less account to be cucko'd in the blade than in the ear, wherein there is some appearance of wisdom.

¶ I have also heard tell of a great foreign personage, who had one of the fairest daughters ever a man had. She was asked in marriage by a noble gentleman of great worth, to whom she was duly promised by her father; but before he would let her go from his house he was minded to enjoy her himself, saying that after having raised her so carefully he would not readily part with so pretty a mount until he had first put her through her paces and seen what she could do. I do not know whether 'tis true, but I

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have heard it said that he not only tried her himself, but let another gallant and handsome gentleman do the same; and withal her husband thereafter found nothing amiss on this account. He would indeed have been lacking in good taste if he had done otherwise, for she was verily one of the world's beauties.¹⁹

¶ I have heard like tales of plenty of other fathers, including the highest of the land, who treated their daughters thus, and who thought no worse of it than the Cock in Æsop's fable; who, when he was found by the Fox, and his life threatened, argued with him concerning the great benefits he conferred upon the world, and particularly the great quantity of poultry he had begotten. 'Ah,' said the fox, 'that is where I have you, Sir Gallant; for you are such a lecher that you make nothing of treading your own daughters as you tread any others;' and thereupon killed him. A worthy and learned Judge.

I leave you then to imagine what such daughters may do with their lovers: for there never was any man's daughter but either had or desired a lover; & some have been handled after this fashion by brothers, cousins and others of their kin, besides their fathers.

¶ In our own times King Ferdinand of Naples had his own aunt in marriage, the daughter of the King of Castile, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, but this was by the Pope's dispensation. There were some indeed who raised the question, whether she should or could give herself in this wise. But this falls far short of the action of the Emperor Caligula, who debauched and redbauched all his sisters, one after another, whereof far beyond all the others he loved the youngest, named Drusilla, whom he had deflowered as a little boy; and afterwards, when she was married to the consul Lucius Cassius Longinus, he took her from her husband and kept her openly as his own wife, & (upon an occasion when he was fallen sick) made her heir to all his possessions, even the Empire. But she died before him, whereat he was so grieved that he ordained a special vacation of the Courts of Justice & cessation of all other public works, to persuade the people to a general mourning, and himself wore his hair and beard

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long for a great while. And thereafter, whenever he addressed the Senate, the people or the troops, he always swore by the name of Drusilla.

As for his other sisters, when he was tired of them he most vilely prostituted them, and gave them to his own pages and servants. If he had done them no worse than this it might pass for little, since he had himself accustomed them to such practice, and 'twas a pleasant wrong (as I have heard it called by certain ravished virgins and ladies taken by force); but he put a thousand indignities upon them: he sent them into exile & took away from them all their rings and jewels to coin into money, having squandered and spent (to small purpose) the great fortune left him by Tiberius. And yet the poor creatures, returning from exile after his death, and finding their brother's body miserably buried under a few turves, had it dug up again, and then burnt and reburied as honourably as they were able—truly a kind and charitable act toward a brother who had handled them so ill.

The Italians excuse this illicit love of near kinsmen by saying that, *Quando messer Bernardo il bucioco sta in colera et in sua rabbia, non riceve legge, et non perdona a nissuna dama*—When Messer Bernardo the young bull stands in his rage he knows no Law and spares no Lady.

¶ We have very many examples of others of the ancients who did likewise. But, to come back to the proper matter of our Discourse, I have heard tell of a gentleman who married his daughter to one of his friends, & was afterwards boasting that he had given him a fair & honest mount, sound in wind and limb, without splint or malanders (so he said), and that he ought to feel himself greatly obliged to him for the gift; whereupon one of the company said aside to his fellow: 'That's true enough, if she had not been mounted and ridden somewhat too young, and so a little worn about the saddle.'

But I should like to ask these gallant husbands: If these mounts had not so often some spot or blemish, or some question or doubt about them, or some defect or deficiency, whether they would get them so cheap, or whether they would not cost them a deal more? Or else, if it were not for

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some such thing, surely they would find other & more worthy husbands; just as a horse-dealer will get rid of his blemished horses when he can, or, if he cannot, will give them away to some gentleman who knows nothing about it; so also (as I have heard said by several fathers) 'tis well to be rid of a daughter who is blemished, or beginning to be blemished, or seems like to be so.

How many girls do I know of the Great World who did not take their virginity with them to the marriage bed! but were nevertheless instructed by their mothers, or other friends or kin or learned procuresses, how to make a proper show in the first assault; and make use of divers contrivances and inventions to please their husbands and to prove to them that they were the first to force a breach. The most part content themselves with a great show of resistance and opposition when the attack begins, and with playing the obstinate in every possible way; whereof some husbands are very glad, & firmly believe they have the glory of making the first charge, like brave & determined soldiers; & next morning (crested like little cocks or bantams who have eaten a fill of millet at night), tell their adventures accordingly to their friends and fellows, and even, perhaps, to those very gallants that first entered the fortress, who go away & laugh themselves sick, either in the privacy of their chambers, or with their lady mistresses, who are mightily pleased at the success of their trick and its merry ending.

There are, however, some suspicious husbands who take this great resistance as an evil augury, & are by no means pleased to find their brides such rebels; like one of my acquaintance, who asked his wife why she played the savage and the difficult in this fashion, and whether she verily disliked him to that degree; whereto she answered (thinking to make her excuse prettily, & lay the blame to no distaste of the man) that she feared lest he should hurt her. 'You have tried it before then?' said he, 'for no hurt can be known unless it has been experienced.' But she subtly denied it, saying that she had it from certain of her fellows, who were married and had so informed her. 'That is pretty information,' said he.

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¶ There is another remedy which these women use, which is to shew upon the morrow of the wedding their sheets stained with blood, which poor virgins must needs shed in the hard assault of defloration; as in Spain, where the said sheets are displayed publicly at the window, & cried aloud: *Virgen la tenemos*; 'we find her a virgin.'

I have been told that they have this same custom at *Viterbo*. And since those girls who have already been under the pike cannot make this shew with their own blood, they use guile for the better marketing of their virginity (as I have heard from divers sources, & as several young courtisans of Rome have themselves assured me), and stain the said linen with some drops of pigeon's blood, which is the most proper of all blood for this deception. And on the morrow the husband spies it, and finds vast satisfaction at the sight of it, firmly believing that 'tis his wife's virgin blood; and it seems to him that he is a very fine and gallant fellow; but he is mistaken.

Whereupon I must tell this following diverting tale of a gentleman, who had his string knit upon his bridal night, and the bride (who was not one of these fair and perfect virgins), thinking that he would doubtless rage as a man should, took the precaution by the counsel of her good friends, matrons, kinsfolk and fellows, of thus staining the undersheet: but by great misfortune the husband was so knit that he could do nothing at all, despite all the preparation she had made in allurements, & in prettily preparing herself for riding, and all her pretty bed-games, wherein she played neither obstinate nor she-devil (or so the onlookers reported, who were hidden in the usual manner near by), being very eager to be ridden, and so hide her earlier defloration. But nothing was done at all.

But at midnight when the company was assembled at the wedding feast, a party sallied forth to assail the bridal chamber in the usual joyous manner, & brought back the napkin as a trophy, which was found prettily stained; whereupon it was promptly shewn and cried to the bystanders, that her virginity had been fairly forced and taken. The husband heard the crying and shouting without, and although he was quite sure he had

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done nothing, put on what gallant airs he could, but was in some perplexity as to the meaning of this. After due thought he concluded that it could be nothing but some womanish trick or subtlety; but nought was said at the time.

The bride and her fellows were themselves mightily disturbed and troubled by the husband's missed fire, and the turn which had been given to their plan. But nought was said on either side until a week later, when by good fortune the husband became unknit, and let fly with good male rage; whereat he was so mightily pleased that he forgot what had passed and went to publish forth to the company that he had now given proof of his prowess, and made her a true wife and fairly mated; confessing that hitherto he had been impotent. Whereupon those present had much to say, and passed divers comments and strictures upon the bride, whom they had deemed deflowered upon that other night. And thus did she bring scandal upon herself, although 'twas not so much she who was to blame as her husband, whose feebleness & soft going had spoilt the whole business.

There are some husbands who can tell well enough despite all such tricks whether they have had their brides' virginity or not, by the signs they find: as did one gentleman of my acquaintance who married a widow. She would have him believe that her first husband was impotent and could do nought, and she still as good as virgin; nevertheless when it came to it he found her so ample that he cried: 'Ho! art this little maid of Marolles, so tight and trim as 'twas said? Nay, 'tis a fine great trodden path; I need not fear to miss my way.' And so he must needs follow and make the best of it; for if 'twas indeed true that her first husband had done nought, many another had wrought in his stead.

¶ What shall we say of certain mothers, who, if they find their sons-in-law impotent, or string-knit, or some such way wanting, play procuress to their daughters; and for the sake of their dowers or jointures bid them play at love with other men, and conceive thereof, so that their children may inherit after their husbands' death?

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I know one such, who so bid her daughter, and nought was left undone that could be done, but never a brat could she get. And I knew an unhappy husband who could not serve his wife, and brought in a big lackey of his, a handsome fellow, to bed her & deflower her while she was asleep, and so save his honour. But she discovered him, & the lackey got nought; whereupon she entered a suit against her husband, and at length the marriage was annulled.

King Henry of Castile did the same; for (according to Baptista Fulguosius) when he found that he could get no children upon his wife he brought to his assistance a certain handsome young gallant of his Court & bid him get them, which he did; & for his trouble bestowed upon him great riches, honours and dignities. We may very well wonder whether the wife was not pleased at this turn of fortune, and glad of the occasion. Truly a good Cuckoo.⁴⁰

¶ As to these knit strings, there was a little while back a suit in the Parliament Court of Paris between the Sieur de Bray, Treasurer, and his wife, for whom he could do nought, having his string knit or some such impotence; and she (little pleased at his service) brought him to law over it. The Court ordered that each should be examined by divers Doctors of skill and knowledge; whereof the husband chose his own, and his wife hers. Hereto there was a song made at Court, which a certain great lady told me herself, while I was at dinner with her. Some said 'twas a lady composed it, others a man. It goes thus:

Bray and his wife can not agree a-bed.
Each says the other's faulty: On this head
Seven wise Doctors, men of Skill and Fame
Were brought to say which of the two's to blame.

Bray took the cheapest, Doctors *Short* and *Small*,
And Doctor *Sleepy*; but she, more practical,
Chose the four greatest that the Schools afford,
The Doctors *Doughty*, *Hardy*, *Long* and *Broad*.

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Which of the pair will win is easy said;
Doughty will drive old *Sleepy* from the bed,
Long will account for *Short*, the rest for *Small*,
And poor de Bray will have no Case at all.

¶ I have heard it told of a certain other husband that the first night he had his new-wed bride in his arms she was so ravished with pleasure and delight that she could not help a little twisting movement of her body, not usual to new-married brides; whereupon he said nought but, 'Ah! I see,' and went on his way. Such are are our good Cuckoos *in the blade*, whereof I know a thousand different tales or more, but should never be done if I were to tell them. And the worst thing I see in this is when they wed cow and calf together (as the saying is), and take a wife already big; like one whom I know, who married a very fair and honest maid (by the favour and at the wish of their lord Prince, who dearly loved the said gentleman and had brought about the match) and at the end of a week she was found to be with child, and actually spread the news herself, pretending thus to play the innocent. The Prince, who had guessed at divers amours between her & another, called her to him & said: See, Madam, I have writ in my tablets the date and hour of your marriage; when I put next them the day and hour of your lying-in, will you not be ashamed? But she did no more than blush at these words, save that thereafter she was the more particular to keep the mien of a *dona da ben*.

¶ But there are some maids who live in such fear of their fathers and mothers that you could more easily steal the life out of their bodies than their little treasure of virginity, dreading their parents a hundred times worse than their husbands.

I have heard it told of a certain very fair and honest maid that being hotly besought by her lover for the pleasures of her love she answered him: Wait a little, that I be wed, and then you shall see how under this cloak of marriage which hides everything we will take our pleasure with right good will.²¹

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Another such, being eagerly sought by a Great Personage, said to him: Ask our Prince to marry me quickly to the gentleman who is my suitor, and let me have this fine wedding I have been promised. And the day after, if you and I do not meet, why, the bargain is void.

I myself know one lady whose love was besought by a certain gentleman (a kinsman of her husband) but four days before her marriage; and in six days after he had his joy of her—or so at least he boasted. And it is not hard to believe, for they shewed such intimacy & privacy of dealings that you would have said they had been brought up together from childhood. He even knew and spoke of the hidden signs and marks on her body, and avowed that they continued their pleasures together a long while. This gentleman said that the occasion which brought about their privacy and sweet play was that once for a masquerade they exchanged clothes, & he put on the habit of his mistress & she her lover's; whereat her husband only laughed, although certain others looked askance at the business.

There was a song made at Court of a husband who was married on Tuesday and cucko'd on Thursday. There's mighty little time lost!

¶ And what shall we say of that maid who was long sought in marriage by a gentleman of good family & great wealth (though otherwise a poor creature, and unworthy of her), but when her parents pressed her to marry him, answered that she would rather die than marry him, and bid them order him to cease his pretensions and never speak to her again of the matter; 'for,' said she, 'if you force me to marry him I tell you that I will cuckold him forthwith.' Nevertheless, marry him she must, for so the thing had been arranged by certain Great Persons who had authority over her, and so her parents willed also.

On the bridal eve her husband, finding her sad and pensive, asked her what ailed her; whereto she answered with heat: 'You would never believe me when I bid you cease your pursuit of me; you know what I have always told you—that if ever I were so unfortunate as to become your wife I would make you cuckold; & I swear I will keep my word.' Neither

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did she mince matters with her fellows or divers gallants; whence you may guess that she was not long about it, and shewed her husband she was an honest woman, for she kept her promise.

I leave you to decide whether or no she was to blame, for one warning is as good as a dozen, and she told him fairly where he was going. Why, then, did he not take heed? Indeed he should have hearkened better to what she said.

¶ These ladies who thus give themselves forth with after marriage do but bear out the Italian proverb: *Che la vacca, ch'è stata molto tempo ligata, corre più che quella che ha havuto sempre piena libertà*; as did the first wife of King Baldwin of Jerusalem (whereof I have spoken before), who was made by her husband to take the veil, but escaped from her convent and fled to Constantinople, where she played the whore so roundly that there was none to whom she said nay (whether men-at-arms or wayfarers or pilgrims bound for Jerusalem), paying no heed to her royal rank. But her long fast from such pleasures in her imprisonment was the cause for it.

¶ I could name many another. This is a pretty sort of Cuckold; as are also those husbands who licence their wives to cuckold them (if they are fair & much sought after for their beauty) to the end that they may profit by it, and win wealth and favour themselves. There are plenty such at the Courts of all great Kings and Princes, and the game is not without profit; for you may see poor men, who have lost their wealth by mortgage or law-suits or military expeditions, raised suddenly up again and enriched by the good service of their wives' sweet members; wherein they find no belittlement, but rather the contrary.

¶ Verily the favours and benefits of Great Persons may well steal away the chastest heart, and get many good Cuckolds. I have had the tale told me of a certain foreign Prince²² who was appointed General by his Sovereign, and sent away in command of a military expedition, leaving his wife behind at Court, one of the fairest ladies of Christendom; but no sooner was he gone than the Prince his Master laid siege to her virtue, and so well that he speedily overthrew it and got her with child.

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The husband, returning a year later, found her in this condition, and was both grieved and wrath with her (and for good reason). But she, who was not inept in such matters, set herself to make excuse, wherein she was helped out by one of her brothers-in-law, saying: 'My Lord, your campaign & its unhappy issue are the cause of this thing, for our Master has taken it very ill (and indeed her husband had handled the expedition but poorly), and in your absence there have been such harsh things said about you that if he had not chanced to cast his love upon me you had surely been undone, & for this reason I let myself be undone to save you. 'Tis mine own honour that is hurt more than yours: for your good I have not spared the most precious thing I had. Consider, then, whether I have wronged you as you say; for if I had done otherwise your honours and favours, even your very life, would have been forfeit. You are better off than ever: the thing is not so public that the stain will cling to you. Therefore, forgive and pardon me.'

Her brother-in-law, who was himself a good pleader (& who perhaps had some hand in the lady's condition) added a few words of weight and discretion; so that at last the dispute was ended and peace made. And thereafter he and his wife were dearer friends than ever before, living together in all good fellowship. But the Prince their master, who had debauched and leapt the lady, never esteemed him so highly again as he had used (or so I have heard); rather thinking the less of him for having taken the matter so lightly, although he was glad enough that the lady came to no harm from having pleased him. I have known many who made excuse for this lady, saying that she did well to give her favours for her husband's good.

¶ Aye, I could bring a host of such instances as this; & one in particular of a great lady who saved her husband's life after he had been convicted of grave malversions & misgovernment & condemned to death; wherefore he loved her very fondly all the rest of his life.

I have heard tell of another great Lord who was condemned to death, and on the very steps of the scaffold was given his reprieve, which his

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daughter had won for him with her beauty; whereupon, coming down those same steps, he said nought but these words: God bless my girl's Fancy, which has saved me my life.²³

¶ S. Augustine is in doubt whether a Christian of *Antioch* had committed a sin when he was imprisoned for debt and permitted his wife to lie with a certain rich gentleman who promised thereby to cancel the bond. If S. Augustine is of this opinion in this case, what would he not allow all those wives, widows and virgins, who to redeem their fathers, kin, or even husbands, do sell their sweet bodies, and undergo many cruel trials and hazards, as prison, slavery, assaults and captures of cities, and the risk of death in divers other fashions; sometimes even to win over Captains and soldiers, or to persuade them to fight well and hold their ground, or to maintain a siege or recapture a lost position (I could give a hundred other occasions); and in such good cause do fearlessly prostitute themselves. What harm or dishonour is there in that? rather is there every good advantage and honour.

Who then will hold that 'tis not sometimes as well to be cuckold; since therein are to be found such benefits & reprieves, such recovery of favour, honours, dignities and riches? How many such fortunate cuckolds do I know myself! and how many others I have heard of! who have been advanced by the beauty and sweet members of their wives.

¶ I would offend none, but I dare say this of many a gentleman of my acquaintance: that their wives have wrought well on their behalf, and done more for them than ever they won by their own merits.

I know a certain great lady of notable skill in such matters, who won the Order of S. Michael for her husband—at that time the only possessor thereof save the two greatest Princes of Christendom. She would often say to him (and that in public, for she was of a merry disposition): Ah, my friend, if you had been alone you would have had a long way to run before you earned this pretty Devil to hang at your neck.

I have heard a tale of a Great Personage²⁴ of the time of King Francis that having received the Order he went to shew it off before my uncle,

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the late M. de la Chastigneraye, saying to him: Ho' how glad you would be to have such an order as mine to hang at your own neck! My uncle, who was sharp of tongue & quick of temper (if ever a man was), answered him back: I would rather be dead than have got it where you found it. The other said nothing to that, for he knew what the thrust meant, and the man with whom he had to deal.

I have heard it told of a great Lord, that when his wife had solicited and obtained for him letters patent appointing him to a great post in the government of his country (which his Prince had bestowed upon him by the good offices of the lady), he would by no means accept it, inasmuch as he knew his wife to have spent three months in high favour at the Court of the Prince, and not without divers suspicions of her chastity. Herein he did but manifest that nobility of spirit which he had shewn all his life. Nevertheless, in the end he accepted it, after having done something whereon I had rather be silent.

¶ So do Ladies win more men their spurs than battles: whereto I would add names (for I know them as well as any man) if 'twere not that I am loath to speak ill of any, or bring scandal upon them. And if 'tis so with honours, why, 'tis no less in the matter of riches.

I know one gentleman who was but a poor devil when he brought his wife to Court; but she was a very fair lady, & in less than two years they were well set up, and become very wealthy people. And in this matter no less than the other we should esteem and honour those ladies who raise up their husbands' fortunes, rather than cucko'ing them & ruining them all in one: as is said of Margaret of Namur, who was fool enough to give herself and all she had to Louis of Orleans (one who was so great and powerful a Lord already, and brother to the King), getting all that she could from her own husband, and sending that after the rest; until at last she made him so poor that he must needs sell his Earldom of Blois to this same M. d'Orleans, who paid him for it with his own money back again, that he had from his wife. She was indeed a fool, for she gave to a greater than herself. And you may well guess how he did afterwards spend much

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mockery upon both of them; for he was the very man to enjoy such a trick, being both greedy and fickle in love.

¶ I myself knew a great lady who was hot in love with a gentleman of the Court and had given him satisfaction of her body, and being unable to make him gifts of money (since her husband kept his gold hid away like a priest) she gave him the most part of her jewels and precious stones, which were worth in all some thirty thousand crowns. Where to it was said at Court that he could well start building, since he had so many stones got together. And it happened that, a little while after, she came into a great fortune, and having put her hand on some twenty thousand crowns gave them forthwith to her gallant, keeping scarce one for herself. 'Twas said that if this inheritance had not fallen in just then, she would have given him the very shift and gown off her back, having nought else to lay hands on. Wherein these spungers and swindlers do great wrong, for 'tis an ill thing so to wrest away all their substance from these poor besotted and loving women. For if the purse is so often visited it cannot keep in good estate and rich condition; unlike that other and bodily purse; which is always the same, and ready for any to fish in it who will, leaving no mark of what culprits have come and gone. This worthy gentleman I spoke of, that was so well furnished with stones, chanced to die soon after ward, and his property was sold at auction, as is the custom in Paris; whereupon his treasures were recognized by many persons who had seen them worn by the lady, to her great shame.

¶ There was a certain great Prince who had as mistress a very honourable lady, for whom he bought a dozen buckles, finely set with diamonds of the first water, and engraved with Egyptian letters and hieroglyphics in such wise as to carry a hidden message, whereof he made her a lover's present. But she, after examining them carefully, told him there was no longer any need of such hidden messages, since the code was already established between them, as it had been between those others I spoke of just now.

I knew a certain lady who used often to tell her husband that she was

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more like to cuckold than beggar him; but in her manner of speech there was some play upon these words, and I think there was not wanting in her dealings with him a little of both.

¶ *None the less I have myself known (and well) a very great number of ladies indeed who did quite otherwise, keeping tighter drawn the strings of that purse wherein they kept their gold than that of their sweet bodies; and, though they were ever so great ladies, would never give aught away save some few rings or trinkets or other such favours, or a muff or scarf to wear as a love-token and add to their repute.*

But even in such small matters I have known one lady^s who shewed great liberality, for the least favour or embroidered scarf she gave her lovers was worth five hundred crowns, or a thousand, or three thousand maybe; for it would have such embroideries, such pearls, embellishments, figures and hieroglyphics, and fair devices, that nothing in the whole world could be fairer. Herein she proved wise, for when such presents and favours are given they are not put away in closets or coffers, as are those of many ladies, but worn abroad and seen of all; and moreover, whenever her gallants saw them they loved and admired her the more for her fine commemoration of their loves; whereas those other gifts of money I spoke of are more meet for common women to give their bullies, than for such great and honourable ladies. Sometimes also she would give divers fine rings, set with gems; for those other favours and embroidered scarves are not commonly worn, save only upon great occasions, whereas a ring upon the finger is more constant company for him to whom it is given.

But in truth a gentle and noble-hearted lover should rather serve his lady for the beauties which shine in her person than for all the gold and silver that shines in her purse.

¶ As for me, I can boast that I have loved in my life many fair & honest ladies, and of no mean estate; and, if I had been ready to take what they pressed upon me, or all I could get, I should to-day have been a richer man than I am (what with money and kind and other favours) by thirty

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thousand crowns; but I have always been content to make known my love rather by my generosity than by my greed.

¶ Certainly it may be said that since the man spends what he has in the sweet purse of the lady's body she should likewise spend of her substance in his; but even so we must weigh the whole matter carefully, and remember that inasmuch as he can never (for all his efforts) spend as much therein as the lady could wish, so also he should be careful not to take from her purse all he could wish for himself; for therein the law should be equal and measured alike for all.

I have seen many gentlemen lose the love of their mistresses by reason of their great demands and importunities; for, seeing them so greedy and hard to satisfy, those ladies did very pleasantly and graciously withdraw from their amours and leave their lovers wanting.

Thus it is that a noble-hearted lover should rather be greedy of his lady's body than her money; for when she is too free with her money and her husband finds his store growing less, he will be a hundred times worse angered at that than at all the liberalities she may have given of her body.

¶ There are some Cuckolds who are made so out of vengeance: whereby I mean to say that many men who have some quarrel with great Lords or other persons, or have had some evil turn or affront therefrom, take vengeance upon them by making love to their wives, & enjoying them, and so fairly cuckolding their enemies.

¶ I knew a certain sovereign Prince who had received divers hints of rebellion from a great Lord his subject, and could find no way of taking vengeance upon him (since he was in hiding from his Master, fearing to be taken prisoner), until one day when his wife had come to Court, seeking to make peace between her husband and the King; whereupon he appointed a meeting with her to discuss the matter, in a certain privy garden and a summer-house thereby. But 'twas rather to speak of love, whereat he was a past master, and quickly overcame the lady and enjoyed her—and this without great resistance, for she was of a goodly composition—and, not content with his own possession of her, gave her to others

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to enjoy also, down to his very lackeys. And thus, said the Prince, he felt very prettily avenged upon his rebellious subject, having possessed his wife & crowned his head with a fair crown of horns; for since he wished to be a little King and Sovereign and wear a crown, so he should, but a crown of horns and not of *fleurs-de-lys*.²⁶

This same Prince played another like trick, by the counsel of his mother, and took his pleasure with a certain virgin Princess, knowing that she was shortly to wed a Prince who had displeased him & troubled his Kingdom; and so deflowered her and enjoyed her finely; and but two months afterward she was given, as a virgin, to be the bride of the said Prince, whose vengeance was of the gentlest, pending another and later vengeance of a harsher kind.²⁷

¶ I know a certain very worthy gentleman who, after playing the gallant for some while to a very fair & honourable lady, asked her for the recompense of his love and service, whereto she answered him frankly: That she would not give him a pennyworth, since she was very sure that he had been courting her not so much of the love of her beauty & fair body (as he vowed) as because he was minded to take vengeance on her husband for some slight offered him, and enjoy her to that end, so that he might have this satisfaction of his enemy; but he vowed again 'twas not so, and continued to love and court her for the space of two years, with so much fidelity and lover's ardour that at last she believed him and took him for her lover, giving him that joy he had so long besought and she so long refused; and at the same time assured him that if at the beginning of their loves she had not had this notion that 'twas some projected vengeance of his upon her husband, she would have done as much then as now, since her heart had all along bid her love and pleasure him. Observe how wisely this lady comported and ordered her desires, not allowing them to carry her away until she was satisfied that she was loved for herself alone, and not as a means to vengeance.

¶ The late M. de Gua, one of the most perfect gallant gentlemen the world has ever known, once bid me dine with him at Court. He had at

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table a dozen of the most distinguished men of learning, among others my Lord Bishop of Dol, of the house of Espinay in Brittany, & Masters Ronsard, de Baif, Desportes, d'Aubigny (these last two are still alive and can bear me out) and others whom I have forgot; but there was no other swordsman among them, save only M. de Gua and myself. During the meal our talk turned upon love, its commodities and incommunities, pleasures and displeasures, and the good and evil it brought in its enjoyment; whereto, after everyone present had had his say, our host concluded with this opinion: that the sovereign pleasure of this exercise was when it served as vengeance; & begged all those great scholars to write a quatrain upon that subject *impromptu*; which they did. I would I had them now, that I might give them here, more particularly that of M. de Dol, who had a tongue and pen of gold, and carried off the prize.

And indeed M. de Gua had occasion to maintain this thesis, as against two great Lords I know of, wherein he gave them a pair of horns apiece, on account of certain ill-will he bore them. Their ladies were both very fair, and I do not doubt he found his pleasure doubled on that account, paying both vengeance & desire at one throw. And I have known others who in like wise revenged and pleased themselves both together, and who share this gentleman's opinion.

¶ I have also known fair and honest ladies, who told me that when their husbands maltreated or mishandled them, or scolded or censured or beat them, or otherwise injured or outraged them, there was nothing so delighted them as to make them cuckold, and, while they were in the act, to think of them, and scoff and mock at them with their lovers; and vowed that this gave them greater appetite and a more ravishing pleasure than could well be described.

I have heard tell of a certain fair & honest lady that once when she was asked whether she had ever cucko'd her husband, she answered: 'Why should I? since he has never beaten me, nor threatened me.' As much as to say, that if he had done either the champion of her Fancy would forthwith have had his vengeance.

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¶ And as to such mockery and pleasant jesting, I once knew a fair and very honest lady to whom it happened that once when she was in the sweet agonies of pleasure, & sweet baths of delight with her lover, what with her springs and embraces and pretty leapings of love, she broke in two a long ear-ring she was wearing, shaped like a cornucopia (made of black glass, after the fashion of that time). Whereat she said to her lover: 'See how Nature watches over us: for one horn that I have broken, here am I at this same instant making a dozen others for my poor cuckoo of a husband, wherewith he may deck himself out at some feast or great occasion, if he likes.'

Another lady, having left her husband a-bed and asleep and come to her lover, & being asked where she had left him, answered: 'He is keeping watch over the cuckoo's nest, lest another should come and lay in it; but 'tis not his bed, nor his sheets, nor his nest that you are seeking, but me; and I have come to seek you also. So he is as good sentinel as need be, 'though he is asleep.'

Whereto I am put in mind by this word *Sentinel* of a tale I heard of a worthy gentleman of my acquaintance, who was once at words with a very honourable lady (whom I also knew), & asked her by way of insult, whether she had ever made the journey to *Saint-Mathurin* (whereto men go to be cured of madness). 'Yes,' says she, 'but could never get into the Church, for 'twas so full of cuckolds, and so well garrisoned before and behind, that I was never allowed near it; and you, who were chief among them, were set up on top of the tower, to keep watch, & warn the others.'

I could tell a thousand other such merry tales, but I should never be done. Nevertheless I hope to find room for a few in some or other corner of this book.

¶ There are some who seem glad to be cuckoos, and invite themselves to this feast of cuckoldom; like certain men I have known who say to their wives: 'So-and-so is in love with you, I see; he comes to visit us very often, but 'tis all for love of you, my sweet. Give him good cheer; his friendship can do us good and pleasant service.'

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Others say to divers of their acquaintance: 'My wife is in love with you: come and see her; 'twill give her pleasure, and you will be able to pass the time happily together.' Thus do they invite lovers in their own despite; as did the Emperor Hadrian once when he was at war in England, and word was brought him that his wife Sabina was playing the game of love very freely at home with divers gallant Roman gentlemen. It so happened that she had writ a letter from Rome to a young gallant who was with the Emperor in England, reproaching him for having forgot her, and making no doubt that he had found other mistresses on his journeys, and that some pretty wench had seduced him away to taste of the pools of her own beauty; and this letter fell into the hands of Hadrian. And a few days later, when this gentleman came to ask leave of the Emperor, saying that he wished to go back to Rome to see to the affairs of his house, he answered with a smile: 'Why yes, my young friend; and go quickly, for my wife the Empress awaits you very eagerly.' Whereupon the young Roman, seeing that his secret was out and fearing some harm of it from his Master, fled away the next night without adieu or waining and went into Ireland.

He need not have had much fear on that score; for the Emperor himself often said when he was confronted at all seasons with his wife's debaucheries: 'If I were not Emperor I should soon be rid of her, but I do not wish to set a bad example.' As much as to say that 'tis of no account to the great to be in this condition, so long as 'tis not published abroad. Nay, but what a fine rule for great men! Many indeed have followed it, though not for this reason. But that is how this good Emperor helped in his own cuckolding.

¶ The worthy Marcus Aurelius, who had a fine whore to wife in Faustina, used to say when they bade him divorce her: 'If we leave her we must leave her dowry also, which is the Empire.' And who would not be cuckold for such a morsel as that, or even a lesser one?

His son Antonius Verus, called Commodus, although he was very cruel, said the same to those who urged him to put to death this said

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Faustina, his mother; who was so hot in love with a certain gladiator that they could never cure her of this sickly heat, until they hit upon the plan of killing the wretched fellow and giving her his blood to drink.

Many a husband has followed in the same path as this good Marcus Aurelius, fearing to put his erring wife to death lest he should lose the fortune she brought him, & preferring to be a wealthy cuckold at so small price than to be a beggar.

¶ And Lord! but I have known a goodly host of cuckolds who were for ever inviting their kinsmen, friends and fellows to come and visit their wives, and even gave banquets and entertainments to draw them thither, and, when they were come, left them alone together in their chambers or closets, and went off saying: I leave her in your keeping.

I knew one Great Personage whose greatest felicity & joy (you would have said) was to be made cuckold; and went about seeking means and occasion, and above all never forgot to make some such first speech as: 'My wife is in love with you; do you love her as much, I wonder?' And when he saw her with her gallant he would as often as not discreetly lead the rest of the company away out of the room, to take a stroll with him or the like, leaving them together to speak more leisurely of their loves. And if by chance he had to return unexpectedly into the room he would pause on the threshold and shout something, or call out to someone, or spit, or cough, so that he might not catch the lovers in their play; for 'tis true enough that however well the facts are known or guessed, these sudden visions and surprizes are little agreeable to either party.

This same Lord was once building a fair great house, and the master-mason came to ask him whether the horns & cornices were to be carved, whereto he replied: 'Horns and cornices! what is that? You must ask my wife, who knows all about such things, and the whole art of geometry; and she will tell you.'

Another of my acquaintances did even worse, for when he was one day selling one of his estates to a neighbour for fifty thousand crowns he took forty-five thousand in gold & silver, & (for the other five thousand)

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a unicorn's horn. Whereupon arose much laughter among those who knew him: 'As if,' said they, 'he had not horns enough at home already, without adding that.'

¶ I knew a very great Lord, of high valour and nobility, who said to a certain other honourable gentleman (although as it were in jest) that he was his very humble servant, and: 'Sir (says he) I cannot tell what you have done to my wife, but she is so mightily in love with you that day & night I hear of nought but you and the tale of your praises. My only answer is to tell her that I knew you before she did, and am well aware of your worth and merits.' Who was astonished? 'Twas the gentleman; for he had done no more than take this lady in to Vespers on his arm, when they were in attendance on the Queen. But he collected his wits as well as he could and answered: 'Sir, I am your lady's very humble servant, and greatly obliged for her good opinion of me, & do hold her in the highest esteem. Nevertheless I am not in love with her; but I pay her my suit, agreeably with this good advice you have just given me, for she can do much for me with my mistress, whom I hope to marry through her good offices, and so pray for her favour and assistance.'

The Prince did nought but laugh, & bid the gentleman pay suit to his wife more diligently than ever, which he did, being very glad to serve so fair a lady and Princess under this pretext; wherewith he soon forgot his other mistress whom he had been of a mind to marry, & thought no more about her, save as mask and cloak to his new loves. And the husband (although he made no ado about the matter) could not but feel some pricks of jealousy when he saw this gentleman in the Queen's chamber a little while afterward, wearing on his arm one of those ribbons of Spanish crimson which had just then been brought to Court as a new fashion, and, after talking with him and handling the ribbon, went off to his wife beside the Queen's bed & found her with a ribbon of the same hue, texture and piece as that other: but he said no word thereon, nor did nought. And in such loves it is well that the fires of passion should be well slaked with the cinders of discretion, so that nothing can be known or discovered;

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for often enough 'tis such discovery & public scandal that turns husbands against their wives, rather than the same thing done with discretion, according to the proverb: *Si non caste, tamen caute*.

¶ How many great scandals and inconveniences have I not seen brought about in my own time by the indiscretions of ladies and their lovers. I am very sure that the husbands would have made but light of them, if they had kept their dealings *sotto coperte*, as the saying is.

I knew one lady who let see all her favours and amours, bestowing them publicly, as if she had no husband, nor was under any authority; refusing to listen to the counsels of her friends and gallants, who remonstrated with her and pointed out the impropriety thereof. And evil befel her thereafter.

This lady did not follow the practice of so many wiser gallant ladies; for those wiser ladies play their game of love so daintily, and take their pleasures with so little display before their fellows, that they never have to bear more than a few light suspicions, which would prove nothing to the keenest eye; for when they meet their gallants in public they are so discreet and so dextrous, and converse with them so affably, that neither their husbands, nor their spies, can for the life of them find anything to bite on. And when their lovers go upon some journey, or chance to die, they cover and hide their griefs so wisely that none knows of it.

I knew a fair lady and honest, who came into the Queen's chamber on a day when a great Lord her lover had died, with a countenance as gay and smiling as the day before. Some thought the more of her for this discretion, and that she bore herself thus for fear of displeasing or irritating the King, who had not liked the dead man. Others, the less, saying that 'twas rather from want of love, wherein (they said) she had always been poorly furnished, as with others who lead such a life as she did.

I know two fair and honest ladies, who lost their gallants in a misfortune of war, and made such regret and lamentation thereof, and shewed their mourning so publicly by their dark clothes, their vessels of holy water, their aspergillums, their deaths-heads, and every sort of emblem

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of death engraved upon their jewels, bracelets and other bawbles, that a great scandal was set afoot, and their repute suffered not a little; although their husbands did not greatly concern themselves.

¶ That is what such ladies do for themselves by the publication of their loves; and while we must respect and praise them for constancy, yet not for discretion, for in that respect they do themselves great hurt. And if these ladies are blameworthy, many of their lovers are as bad as they; for they look as green and sickly as a she-goat in kid, and play the shy lover in public, and languish upon their mistresses, casting amorous glances, and heavy sighs, and passionate gestures, and openly wear their colours; in short, they so little restrain themselves that a blind man would see what was forward—and some behave in this wise on false pretences, letting it be supposed that their loves are set in high places, and have good fortune therein; when (God knows!) very likely their ladies would not so much as give them them a penny for alms, for all God's instruction to charity.

¶ I once knew a Lord and gentleman who (wishing to advertize that he was her lover) sent a mule, with a couple of lackeys and pages in attendance, to wait outside the door of a certain fair and honest lady, whom I also knew. It so chanced that M. d'Estrozze^{ss} & I passed that way, & saw this little mystery of the mule with its lackeys and pages. He asked them where their master was, to which they answered that he was within; whereupon M. d'Estrozze burst out laughing, and said to me that he would wager his head that he was not there at all. Posting a page to keep watch, whether this would-be lover came forth from that house or not, we went forthwith to the Queen's chamber, where to our great merri-ment we found the said gentleman. Next evening we sought him out, and (making believe to quip him upon his amours) asked him where he was at such-and-such an hour of the afternoon, telling him that he could not get out of it, for we had seen the mule and pages before that lady's door. Whereupon he confessed, although professing great chagrin that we had seen aught, & could quip him upon his adventure in that quarter, that 'twas indeed where he had been; but begged us to tell no-one of it,

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or 'twould put him out in good earnest, and moreover set a scandal about this poor lady and embroil her with her husband—which we promised him, saying that no word should be uttered, but all the while laughing in our sleeves and making mock of him, for all that he was a Lord of considerable rank and quality. But after some days of this comedy, and somewhat too many repetitions of his trick of the mule, we discovered the jest, and began to poke fun at him in good earnest and in good company; whereat he desisted for very shame, especially as the lady had learnt of it from us, and, having spied the mule and its pages one day from her window, had them driven away from her door like common beggars. And we did even better, for we told the tale to her husband, and made him laugh very heartily, saying that he had no fear of being cucko'd by that man, and that if he found the said mule and pages posted before his door he would have it opened to them and let them within, so that they might have shelter and comfort, and come in out of the heat, or the cold, or the rain, or whatever it might be. (Others, nevertheless, cucko'd him, if not this gentleman.) That is how one worthy Lord thought to add to his repute at the expense of an honourable lady, caring nought for any scandal he might bring on her.

¶ I knew another gentleman who brought scandal upon a very fair and honest lady, whom he had loved for some long while, and begged her to give him (but in vain) the little dainty which is for the husband's mouth alone; and after several refusals he said to her in despair: 'Very well, you will not then; but I swear to ruin your honour.' And to this end he continued a constant coming and going about her house, in a secret fashion, and yet not so secret but that several eyes could see and note it, taking every opportunity he could of being observed, by night as well as by day; and also boasted in confidence to his friends of his pretended good luck, and in public gatherings would seek her out with more obvious discretion than was necessary, and play the gallant among his fellows; & all this to such effect that being found in that lady's room late one night all wrapped up in his cloak, and making belief to hide from the men of the house,

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he aroused the suspicions of the *major domo*, who set a watch upon him; and although he could not catch him the husband gave his wife a thrashing, and afterwards (urged on by the *major domo*, who said that was not enough) stabbed and killed her, and for this act received a ready pardon from the King. That was indeed a shame, so to waste a fair lady, for she was very fair. But the gentleman who brought this about did not long prosper afterwards, for he was killed in a petty battle, by the grace of God, for having so vilely stolen away her honour and her life from this good lady.

¶ The truth is, in this case as in many others of my experience, that there are some ladies who do themselves an injustice, & are properly the cause of their own dishonour and scandalization; for 'tis they themselves who go out skirmishing, and fetching lovers to them; and from the beginning give them the prettiest caresses in the world, & other intimacies, so emplanting hope in their breasts with fair words and allurements; but when it comes to the point they flatly deny them. So that these honest gentlemen, who have promised themselves many sweet pleasures of their bodies, lose heart and take a rude leave of those ladies, and go about dishonouring them and giving them out as the biggest whores alive, telling a hundred worse things about them than there are to tell.

This, then, is good reason why an honest lady should never set about to draw a gallant gentleman to her service, without contenting him at the end, according to his merits and devotion. She must well consider this, if she would not be undone; and that although she has to do with an honourable and gallant man: or else, from the first beginning, if he comes to pay court to her and she sees that 'tis on this so much desired end that he is bent, and if she is in no mind to let him reach it, then she should send him about his business the first time he sets foot in her house; for, to speak frankly, any lady who lets herself be loved & served so commits herself that she cannot cry off before the battle; come to it soon or late she must, however late it be.

But there are some ladies who are pleased to get service for nothing,

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save the love of their bright eyes; and say that they wish to be served, and that 'tis their especial joy, but not to come to the point; and say that they take their pleasure in wishing and not in doing. I have myself been told this by certain ladies. Nevertheless, they cannot reckon on this calculation, for, if they do but once set about wishing, without so much as a shadow of doubt they will end by doing; for so 'tis ordained by the law of love, that when a lady wishes, or desires, or so much as dreams of desiring a man for her own, 'tis as good as done. If a man but know it, & if he do but follow resolutely where she leads, he will catch her in the end, by the foot, or the feathers, or by the wing or the hair, as the saying is.

That is how these poor husbands are cucko'd by the good intentions of wives who believe in wishing but not doing; but without meaning it those ladies are often enough burnt in the candle, or rather the fire, of their own making; just like those poor simple shepherdesses, who, to warm themselves while they are keeping their flocks in the cold fields, light a little bonfire, never dreaming of harm or danger; but sometimes, while they are not looking, this little fire lights a larger, which burns a whole countryside of fields and thickets.

¶ 'Twould be as well if such ladies followed the wise example of the Countess d'Escaldasor of *Pavia*, besought in love by M. de Lescu, since better known as Marshal de Foix (a student at the town of *Pavia* in his youth, and at that time called the Protonotary de Foix, inasmuch as he was intended for the Church; but later he put off the cassock to take up arms)—a very fair lady, reckoned the first beauty of Lombardy—who, when she found herself hard pressed, and unwilling to send him rudely about his business, nor displease him (for he was a near kinsman to the great Gaston de Foix, M. de Nemours, under whose great renown all Italy trembled at that season), found this means to shew her mind. One day of great festival, when all the Great Ladies of *Pavia*, and the most notable beauties from all the country round, were met together at an assembly with the honourable gentlemen of the place, the Countess appeared in a dress of surpassing beauty, richly composed of sky-blue satin,

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and embroidered all over with figures representing lit tapers, with butterflies hovering round them and burning their wings, the whole richly worked in silver and gold thread, as the excellent embroiderers of *Milan* well know how (better than all others); and so beautifully devised that she was voted the best appointed lady there.

The Protonotary de Foix, as he led her out to dance, was quick to ask what was the meaning of these emblems on her dress, for he guessed that they held some hidden significance which was not for his pleasure. She answered him: 'Sir, I have done with my dress what horsemen and men-at-arms do to restive and vicious horses, who are for ever kicking and prancing; they put silver bells on their cruppers, so that when they are in a press of company their fellows may know by this signal to take heed of such wicked horses and keep clear of their heels. And in like wise, by these butterflies burning at these tapers, I warn those men of honour who do me the courtesy of loving me and admiring my beauty, not to come too close, nor to desire aught else than the sight of it; for they will get nothing, any more than these butterflies, save desiring and burning, and that is all.' (This tale is set down in the *Emblems* of Paolo Jovio.) And by this expedient the Countess warned her lover to take heed before 'twas too late. I cannot tell whether he did indeed draw closer, nor what came of it; but I know that afterwards, when he was mortally wounded in the battle of *Pavia*, and taken prisoner, he begged to be carried to this lady's house in the city, where he was very well received and treated. And there at the end of three days he died, to the great sorrow of the Countess, as was told me by M. le Montluc, one night when we were in the trenches before *La Rochelle*, and I had been telling him the tale of this device of the dress. He said that he had often seen this fair lady, & that she loved the said Marshal very dearly and treated him very honourably. For the rest, he could not say whether they had ever gone further in their loves. At any rate this example should be enough for those ladies of whom I was speaking.

¶ There are some Cuckolds who are so good of heart that they have their

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wives lectured and admonished by religiouses and holy men, for their correction and conversion to a better life; and with feigned tears and dissimulating speeches they take great vows, promising mountains & marvels of repentance, and that they will never sin again: but their oaths last no time at all, for the promises and tears of such ladies are no more worth than lovers' vows. There was one lady I knew upon whom the sovereign Prince her master put the singular affront of sending a Cordelier (with the credentials and authority of a King's Messenger) to take word to her distant husband, in the province where he was serving, advising him of his wife's follies and amours and the evil she was bringing on her name and his throughout the Court, and saying that he felt it his duty to give him early warning, so that he might bring correction to this erring soul. The husband was mightily astonished at such an embassy and charitable office: he answered nought save to thank him and express a hope that something might be done; but when he came back to his wife he did nothing. For what would have been the use? When a woman is once set in this path she never leaves it, like a post-horse which is so accustomed to gallop that he knows no other way of getting along.

Eh! how many honourable ladies do you not know who have been caught sinning, and trounced, beaten, bullied and coaxed, either by force or kindly persuasion, to repent & sin no more, & have promised, vowed and sworn to be chaste; and then practice the proverb, *Passato il periglio, gabbata il santo*, & turn more hotly than ever to amorous war. And some there are who, feeling some gnawing worm in their souls, take of their own accord very holy and very solemn oaths, but never keep them, and repent of their repentance, as Master du Bellay says of repentant courtesans. And such ladies say that 'tis hard to give up for ever so sweet a practice and performance, since they are for so little a while upon this earth.

I would willingly refer my point to those fair ladies who have repented young, and taken the veil and seclusion, if they were asked to say, on their honour and conscience: Whether they do not often long for their high

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walls to fall flat, & whether, if they did, they would not forthwith escape out?

¶ Thus it may be seen that 'tis folly for husbands to think of influencing their wives to better courses, when they have once taken the bit between their teeth, save by giving them free rein, and urging them only to discretion and the avoidance of scandal; for you may use all the remedies for love that ever Ovid knew, and an infinity of others besides, including the authentical inventions of Master Francis Rabelais which he taught the venerable Panurge, and all in vain. 'Twere best, indeed, to do what is said in an old song of the time of King Francis I:

*If men would stay their wives
From leading evil lives,
In barrels they must keep 'em
And by the bung-hole leap 'em.*

¶ In the time of King Henry there was a certain ironmonger who brought to the *Fair of Saint-Germain* a dozen strange engines for bridling women's virtue,⁴⁹ made of iron and fastening like a belt, round about and below, and all to lock with a key; so subtly made that once a woman were safely bridled in one of these she could never so much as come near the sweet pleasures of love, having only some small perforations for the necessities of Nature.

It is said that some five or six angry jealous husbands bought these engines and bridled their ladies so fast that they might well say: 'Farewell, happy days!' But there was one lady who sought out a very subtle locksmith (one day when her husband was abroad in the fields) & having shewn him the engine and all, bade him make her a master key, wherewith she could open and shut it whenever she would. The husband never got wind of the matter; and she took her fill thereafter of sweet pleasure, in this jealous fool of a cuckold's despite, who thought he could live the rest of his life in peace and safety from cuckoldry. But that naughty locksmith had spoiled it all for him, and did better (they say) for 'twas he who

first entered and planted him a pair of horns. And herein he but followed his trade; for had not Venus herself, the fairest lady and wanton in the whole world, a locksmith to husband, Vulcan, who was a most wicked and dirty scoundrel, one-eyed and very ugly.

They say also that there were a number of gallant worthy gentlemen of the Court who threatened this ironmonger that if ever he brought any more such trash to sell they would kill him, and bade him go and throw what he had left into the midden; which he did, and no more has been heard of him and his engines. And herein was wisdom, for such bridles and locks and unnatural fastenings would be enough to lose half the world its population, for want of coupling and generation.

¶ There are some who give their wives into the keeping of eunuchs, which the Emperor Alexander Severus strongly denounced, and strictly ordered that such creatures should have nothing to do with Roman ladies. But they were nevertheless engaged; not that they begot children on these ladies, but they procured them certain small and superficial pleasures, which gave an earnest of the greater and perfect reality; and of this most husbands took small account, saying that their chief chagrin at their wives' adultery was not that they gave themselves elsewhere, but the displeasure of feeding, & bringing up, & reckoning as their own, children they had not begotten. For, without that, 'tis a small matter; as I have known many find it whose wives had good-hearted & easy-going lovers, who provided for the children they had begotten on them; whereas their husbands were not at all put out, but bade their wives ask for a pension and settlement upon them because of it. Such was the case with a certain great lady of my acquaintance who bore a son, Villeconnin, to King Francis I. She begged him to settle some little estate before he died upon the child he had gotten; & this he did, assigning him two hundred thousand crowns in bank, which grew in time with profits and interest until, when he was a man, he was of such great wealth and could spend so lavishly at Court and at play that everyone was astonished to see it. Indeed, they could only suppose that he had it from some lady whose lover he

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was, and as he never budged from his mother's side they guessed it was she; but they were wrong, for she was his mother, 'though few knew it. And indeed, his parentage would never have been known at all if he had not chanced to die at Constantinople, & his escheatage, as bastard, passed to the Cardinal de Retz; who was very quick and subtle at discovering such mysteries when they were for his own profit, and verified the bastardy which had been so long a while hidden; & so carried off his fortune over the head of M. de Teligny, who was the appointed heir of this said Villeconnin.

Others said that 'twas not the King's child at all, but some other's of her lovers, and that she had thus enriched him from her own fortunes; but M. de Retz searched so diligently among the banks that he identified the King's money and obligations. Others again said that it was some lesser Prince or other gentlemen who had begotten him, but that to cover the whole matter and provide well for the child it was no bad notion to attribute everything to the Throne, as is done in divers other matters.

¶ I think there are many ladies in France and other lands, who, if they thought to bear children at such a price, would not be slow to let themselves be leapt by Kings and other Great Persons. But often enough they are so leapt, & never a mouthful comes of it, wherein they are grievously cheated, for many ladies only give themselves to such men for the sake of the *galardon*, as they say in Spain.

¶ There is matter for great argument concerning these putative & doubtful children: Whether they should inherit the family fortune, or whether 'tis not great rascality in their mothers to make them so inherit? whereon certain learned men have opined that the woman should tell her husband the whole truth; and this is the opinion of the *Subtle Doctor*.³⁹ But others say this is unsound, inasmuch as the woman defames herself by such revelation, and is therefore not in obligation to do it; for according to Solomon a good name is the greatest earthly treasure.

It is, then, better that the child should have the fortune, than that a good name be lost; for, as the proverb says: *Good repute is better than a*

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golden girdle. Hence the theologians have a maxim which says: That when we are in obligation to two different precepts and commandments, the less must give way to the greater. But the commandment which bids us love good repute is a greater than that which bids us give all men their due; thus it takes first place and preference.

Moreover, if the woman reveals such a matter she puts herself in danger of death from her husband himself; and 'tis straitly forbidden to encompass our own death. It is not even allowed a woman that she should kill herself to avoid violation, nor after such misfortune. So that 'tis better she should let herself be violated (if she cannot help it), running & crying out as best she may, but not kill herself; for the violation of the body is no sin, unless the heart consents thereto. That was the answer which S. Lucy made to the tyrant who threatened to send her into a brothel. 'If my chastity is forced,' said she, 'twill win a double crown.'

¶ Some there are who for this reason censure Lucrece. It is true that SS. Sabina and Sophronia, and other Christian virgins who have taken their own lives rather than fall into the hands of barbarians, are excused by our learned fathers and doctors, saying that 'twas by some especial prompting of the Holy Ghost. And no doubt it was this same prompting which, at the capture of Cyprus, made a newly baptized Cypriote maiden (who was being carried off into slavery by the Turks along with other ladies) set fire to the powder magazine of the galley, so that in a moment she and all who were on board were burnt and consumed; saying: 'Now, please God, our bodies shall not be outraged and polluted by these vile Turks and Saracens.' But (God knows) perhaps it had already been polluted, & she was thus minded to do penance; unless it was that her master would not touch her lest he should lose the money he might get for her as a virgin, for in those countries (as in others) men are very nice and dainty after such fresh morsels.

¶ But to come back to our subject of the guardianship of poor trammelled ladies; those worthy eunuchs, as I have said, are for ever committing adultery with them and cuckolding their husbands, excepting only

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that they beget nothing. And upon this subject there come to my mind two Ladies whom I knew in France who set their love upon two castrated Gentlemen, so that no trouble could come of it; & yet they found pleasure in their play, without any breath of scandal. But I have heard of certain husbands in Turkey and Barbary who, when they discovered this trick, forthwith castrated their poor slaves double, and left them with nothing at all, whereof (according to those who are well acquainted with Turkey) there are not two out of a dozen that live after this cruel treatment, but such as do are very highly thought of and beloved by their masters, who reckon them the only true, safe and chaste wardens of their wives' virtue and their own honour.

¶ We Christians use no such cruel and rigorous practice; but instead of these eunuchs we put our ladies in charge of sexagenarians and old men, as they do in Spain—even the Queen's own ladies, whom I have seen so guarded. But (God knows!) there are some old men who are a hundred times more dangerous than young ones, and a hundred times hotter, and more inventive, and more industrious, to seduce & leap ladies & young maids.

I think that such old men are none the better keepers for their white hairs and beards, nor old women neither; as one elderly Spanish *duenna* I have heard of, who was conducting her young charges through a certain hall where divers paintings of horns and members were upon the walls, very life-like and mightily fashioned out of all proportion; and said as they were passing: *Mira que tan bravos no los pintan estos hombres, como quien no los conociese*. And thereupon her girls turned as she bid them, except one (whom I knew) who played the innocent and asked her fellow what sort of birds those were, for some of them were shewn with wings. To which the other replied that they were birds of Barbary, & prettier in life than in picture. God knows whether she had ever seen any, but she made the pretence.

¶ Many a husband is mistaken in these keepers & such like; for he thinks that so long as his wife is in some old woman's hands (whom she calls

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perhaps *Mother*, or other such courtesy title) her virtue is out of all danger. But there is no sort of person easier to suborn & win over, for being of an avaricious and greedy kind, they will take whatever they can get for the sale and betrayal of their prisoners.

Others are by nature unable to keep safe watch over their young women, for while these are quick-witted and ready (and more particularly when they are in love), those are for the most part asleep in the chimney corner; and sometimes cuckolds are made in their very presence, and they know nothing of it.

I myself knew one lady who did this before her governess, so cleverly that she never knew of it. And another who did the same before her own husband & as good as under his very eyes, while he was playing at *primero*.

Other old women have bad legs, and cannot follow their ladies fast enough; for before they can get to the end of an alley, or a glade, or from one room to another, their ladies have done what they would, & nothing seen at all by those women with their slow trot & short sight. And there are yet other elder ladies and governesses who have themselves followed this sweet trade in their youth, and take pity to see young folk starved of it, and so are kindly to them, or perhaps themselves shew them the way, and persuade them to follow it and help them all they can. Moreover, Aretino says that the greatest pleasure a lady can have who has known love and its delights, is to shew another the same.

¶ And that is why, when one has need of a good minister in love, 'tis better to seek out an old procuress rather than a young one. And thus I had it from a very gallant gentleman, that he expressly forbade his wife to consort with old women, inasmuch as they were dangerous, but bade her go with young ones as much as she would; and he gave a great number of reasons, which I will leave to better debaters than I.

And that is why a certain Lord of quality (whom I know) confided his wife, of whom he was jealous, to a cousin of his, a virgin, to be her governess; wherein she carried out his charge very faithfully, although she played only by halves the part of the gardener's dog; for he will neither

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eat the cabbage himself out of his master's garden, nor let others eat it; but she ate her own fill, and would never let her cousin have any. Nevertheless she contrived to snatch a mouthful here & there, which the other never saw, for all her keenness, or so she pretended.

I could tell of endless remedies which these poor jealous cuckolds use to bridle, tether, hobble and leash their wives, and keep them from the leap; but they may try all these old devices till Doomsday, and think out new ones as well, and only waste their time. For when once women have got this saucy little worm of love into their heads, they will send their husbands to be bedfellows of *Guillot the Dreamer* (that is to say, forever brooding & puzzling their heads over their wives' crafts & subtleties); as I hope to treat at length in another Discourse (which I have half finished), concerning the ruses and ingenious devices of wives in the matter, which I compare with the ruses & stratagems of war. And the prettiest remedy of all, and the safest and gentlest ward that a jealous husband can keep over his wife, is to let her go wherever she will; for, as a very gallant married man once said to me, it is woman's nature that the more a thing is forbidden her the more she desires it, & above all in love, where appetite grows faster in restraint than in freedom.

¶ And here is another sort of Cuckold, but as to this there is a puzzling question: that is to say, if a lover has enjoyed his mistress and had his pleasure of her in her husband's life-time, and then the husband dies and that same lover afterwards marries his widow, is he then his own cuckold, and should he bear this name and title? I have known not a few gentlemen in this condition, and Great Persons at that.

Some say that he cannot be a cuckold, since 'tis his own doing, and his horns of his own planting, and no one else is concerned in the business. Nevertheless, there has been many an armourer who made a sword that afterwards killed him.

Others say that he is indeed cuckold, but only *in the blade*. To this they adduce many arguments, but inasmuch as the case is as yet in dispute I will leave it to be pleaded in whatever court will listen to it.

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¶ Here I must tell a story of a certain great lady, who, although married already, has long been promised in second marriage to a gentleman who has been her lover and protector for fourteen years, and still is; during all which time she has been waiting for her husband to die. But devil any dying would he do to please her! until at last she could not but cry: A curse on this husband and mate of mine, who has lived beyond his time! Sickneses and ill humours of his body he has had in plenty, but of death never a sign. So much so, indeed, that our late King Henry (who had settled this said cuckold's estate upon a certain very brave and honest gentleman) was wont to say: There are two of my Court who are mighty impatient for So-and-so to die; one to get his estate, and the other to wed her lover; but both have been cheated of it as yet.

See how wise and provident is God, in not answering such wicked prayers. And now (they tell me) those two have fallen out of late, and broken their troth for that pretty second wedding of theirs, to the great chagrin of the lady, but to the joy of the would-be husband; for he was minded to try his fortune elsewhere, and not wait any longer for the death of the other husband—who has had the laugh of everyone, giving the alarm often enough, that he was at the point of death, but in the end 'tis he who has outlasted the lover. Aye! 'tis God's punishment, without a doubt, for who ever heard of such a troth-plighting? Is it not a strange & monstrous thing to arrange a second wedding while the first husband is yet alive?

There is another tale I like, of a certain great lady (though not so great as that other) who was sought in marriage by a gentleman, and married him, not for any love she bore him but because he was sickly, thin and wasting, and ordinarily in very poor health, so that the doctors told him that he would not live a year; and all this even after he had several times had this fair lady to lie with him in his bed. Thus she hoped to be soon rid of him, and possess all his goods and chattels and furnishings after his death, and the advantage of his name and position; for he was a very rich and distinguished gentleman. But she was mistaken, for he lived blithely

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on, & a hundred times better than ever he was before he wed her; & now 'tis she that is dead. They say that he feigned this sickness and wretched state, inasmuch as he knew the lady was very greedy, and would only marry him to get his wealth; but God disposed otherwise, as I have said, and kept the she-goat grazing, despite herself, at the spot she had chosen. ¶ What are we to say of certain men who marry whores and courtesans of renown? (as is done often enough in Fiance, but oftener still in Spain) and think they are doing a work of charity, *por librar una anima cristiana del infierno* (as they say) and to put her in the right and holy path.

I have known many hold the opinion that if 'tis done with such good and holy intention they should not be accounted Cuckolds at all; for what is done to the glory of God ought not to be turned to a reproach: provided always that once these wives are set in the right way they do not leave it again and go back to the other, as I have seen in several cases in both these countries, where they truly repented and sinned no more after marriage; but very often they cannot be kept fast, and go back & stumble into the old ditch.

¶ The first time I was in Italy I fell in love with a very beautiful courtesan in Rome, who was called Faustina. But as I had but little money, and she was too high a price—ten, or twelve crowns a night—I must needs be content with looking and longing, and some small conversation. Some while later I went to Rome a second time, and as I was by then better furnished with money I sought out her dwelling and paid her a visit by the good offices of a friend. I found her the wife of a man of law, 'though still in her old quarters; and she received me very graciously, telling me of her fortunate marriage, & how that she had done with her past follies and bid them adieu for good and all. But, dying of love for her, more than ever, I shewed her some good French crowns; whereat she was tempted, and accorded me that which I so much desired, telling me that when she married her husband it had been arranged and agreed between them that she should have full liberty, but without scandal, or any sort of deceit, and more particularly when a goodly sum was in question, so that they might

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live in ease and splendour; and she said that she would only give her favour for a goodly sum, and then was willing enough, but with petty lovers she had no truck at all. Here was a fine Cuckold, in blade and ear both together.

¶ I have heard tell of a lady of the Great World who, when she married, made her husband leave her at Court, so that she might make love, and reserved the tenure of her dead-wood and faggot (as the saying is), to do with as she pleased; & in consideration of this gave him a thousand francs a month pocket money to spend on his own pleasures, and never lent a care to aught save her own joys and amusements.

And thus it is that ladies who have once known freedom in this wise can never willingly settle down under ward & key, but must needs break whatever constraint is put upon them, and this more particularly when the glint of gold is in their eyes: as witness that fair daughter of King Acrisius, who—all shut up in her strong tower as she was—was yet seduced away by the fair golden rain of Jupiter.

Ah! 'tis hard indeed, said one gallant gentleman, to keep watch over a woman who is fair, ambitious and covetous, and longs to make a brave show, to be finely dressed, diapered and richly appointed, that she is not put on her back by some rich lover; and that, however well her Fancy be armed, and however brave and gallant and quick with his sword her husband may be in her defence.

I have known many a brave & valiant man who has come to this pass. And indeed 'tis a great shame to see men of honour, valour and renown so treated; and that after all their fair victories and conquests of their country's enemies, and the renown they have won in the field, they must needs wear, among the laurels and plumes of their crests of triumph, a pair of mean horns. It is true that such men are more concerned with their own ambitions, & the fame of their battles, charges, & other warlike exploits, than with the care of their wives and the honour of their beds. And thus they come, without ever knowing it, to the city & conquest of Cornwall (or the land of horns); which is a very great pity nevertheless.

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I knew one such, a very brave soldier, of great rank and fame, who was one day amusing himself by telling us divers tales of his battles and victories; when a certain other gentleman there present, his comrade and intimate friend, said aside to another of the company: He boasts of his conquests; but I am surprized to hear him; for his lady's Fancy has been more roundly attacked and taken than any city he ever attempted, or ever will.

I have known others who, for all their fine looks, splendours and grandeurs, had nevertheless this stamp of cuckold upon them, which spoilt all the rest; for this stamp and head-dress can never be hidden, try how you will, but is clear and visible beneath all your gallant bearing and fine gestures. I myself have never in all my life seen a cuckold who had not the marks of it on him, excepting only one, whom I knew well, wherein the subtlest observer could have found nothing to bite on (unless he had known his wife), so free & so gracious was his bearing, & his countenance so full of gravity and honour.

¶ I would beg those ladies who have such perfect husbands, not to put such affront and indignity upon them. But then perhaps they will say to me: 'And where are these perfect husbands you talk of, and preach to us about?'

And of a truth, Ladies, you are right; for we cannot all be Scipios and Cæsars, and in these days you do not find such men as they. So I am of opinion that you had best do as you like in this matter, after all; and, besides (since we have spoken of Cæsar) 'tis true that the most gallant of men have travelled this road, and those most dowered with virtues and perfection of all kinds; as we read of the great & accomplished Emperor Trajan, whose perfections could not keep his wife Plotina from yielding herself up to the good pleasure of Hadrian; who was Emperor after him, and drew much profit and advancement from this love-affair, thereby reaching his high rank and favour. Nor was he unmindful of his debt to her, for he loved and honoured her exceedingly all his life, and when she died he mourned her so heavily and fell into such brooding sadness that

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he could neither eat nor drink for a long while, and was forced to stay in *Gallia Narbonensis* (where he was at the time the tidings were brought him) three or four months, during which time he wrote to the Senate to number her among the gods, and at her burial to offer her sacrifices of great treasure and splendour; and himself set about building a very fair temple near *Nismes*, adorned with rich marble and porphyry and other stones and jewels.

¶ Thus in this matter of love and its satisfaction we need take no heed of appearances. Moreover Cupid, the god of these things, is himself blind; or so, at least, some ladies seem to find him, who have as handsome and honourable and accomplished husbands as you could wish to see, and yet go off and fall in love with other gallants, so foul and ugly they could not be worse.

I have known many such; of whom one might well ask the question: Which is the bigger whore? she who has a handsome & honest husband, and takes an ugly, loutish lover, or she who has an ill-favoured husband and takes a handsome lover, but does not cease to love and fondle her husband nevertheless, as if he were the very flower of men?

Certainly most people will say that a woman who leaves a handsome husband for an ugly lover is a very great whore; just as a man who leaves good meat for foul is a very great glutton. And when a woman leaves beauty for ugliness it seems indeed for very wantonness; inasmuch as there is nothing which is so wanton, or a better minister to lust, than a foul and strong-smelling lover, with the stench of a lewd and filthy he-goat more than a man. For gallant and well-favoured men are somewhat more dainty and less apt to arouse excessive and abandoned lusts than great harry ruffians and churls and satyrs.

¶ Others say that she who loves a handsome lover and an ugly husband both at once, and gives her favours and caresses to both, is just as big a whore, for hereby she shews that she is greedy and cannot bear to lose one mouthful of her ordinary.

Such women are like those travellers (even in France) who, when they

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pull up at an inn at night, never forget to call out for the wheeler's measure", and will have it, even though he be stuffed with food already.

In like wise these women will always have their wheeler's measure at bed, come what may (like one lady of my acquaintance who had a husband that was a good and powerful executant); and moreover increase and double that measure by every means in their power, desiring a handsome lover for the day-time, when the sun lights up his beauties and so gives the lady a better appetite for her pleasures and more delight in her play; and Master Husband with his ugliness for the night-time, for (as the saying is) all cats are grey at night, & so long as her appetite is satisfied it matters not whether he is ugly or handsome.

For (according to what I have been told) when they are in the ecstasies of pleasure neither man nor woman has a thought for anything at all save the play and partner of the moment: 'though it is true that ladies often would have their lovers believe that when they are in the lists with their husbands they keep their lovers before their eyes & in their minds, never giving a thought to their husbands, and thus achieve their delight; and I have heard it of husbands also, that when they are with their wives they think of their mistresses; but these are abuses.

¶ Philosophers and students of Nature tell me many reasons why it is only the present object which fills and dominates the mind upon these occasions; but I myself am not good enough philosopher or naturalist to argue this matter, and, besides, some of their arguments and instances are somewhat lewd and I would fain preserve a fair exposition. But as for this choice of ugly lovers, I have seen a host of instances in my day, and been a hundred times astonished at it.

¶ Once when I was just returned from a journey to a foreign country (which I will not particularize, lest it should be known of whom I speak) & in conversation with a certain great lady, she questioned me concerning another great lady and Princess whom I had met there: How she made love? I told her who it was that was reckoned her lover, who was neither handsome nor gallant, and of small quality. She answered: 'Well, she is

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doing herself a great wrong, and Love as well, if she is indeed as fair and honourable as they say.'

This lady was right in her judgment, and she herself stood by it, nor spoke without good ground; for she had a very gallant lover & gave him her favours very heartily. And when all is said, no lady deserves reproach for loving and choosing a fair object of her love, nor, indeed, wrongs her husband, when she does it in the good service of their lineage; for there are some husbands who are so ugly, so stupid, so fatuous, so ill-favoured, poor-spirited, soft-headed, liver-bellied, low-loined & short-winded that if their wives had children in their image they might just as well have none at all; as has indeed been the case with several ladies of my acquaintance, who had children by such husbands that were of like dismal countenance, but others by their lovers which surpassed their fathers, brothers and sisters in every way possible.

Some of those Philosophers who have treated of this subject maintain that such chance and natural children, and those begotten in secret and unawares, are more gallant, and bear the mark of the sweet and eager and hasty manner of their begetting, and are of altogether different stuff from those who are begotten in a customary bed, heavily, stalely, leisurely and half asleep, with no thought but of brute pleasure.

I have heard it said also, by those who have charge of the studs of Kings and great Princes, that they have often seen better foals come out of dams who were covered by chance or error than those bred with all the care and skill of the breeder, with chosen and appointed stallions. And it is the same with human kind.

How many ladies I have known, that have brought fair and brave and sturdy children into the world, who, if their putative fathers had begot them, had been very brutes and mooncalves.

That is why ladies are well advised to call in good and well-favoured stallions to help them breed good stock. But I have known not a few, who had good husbands, call in ugly and ill-favoured lovers as stallions, who got upon them hideous and unwholesome offspring.

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And that, by your leave, is one of the signal commodities and incommodities of Cuckoldom.

¶ I knew a lady of the Great World who had a husband that was very ugly and very impertinent; but out of four daughters and two sons that she bore, there were only two which were worth anything, being begot by her lover; and the others, begot by her scritch of a husband (or scritch-owl, as you might say, for he was very like), were as mean and ugly as he.

Ladies have need of good counsel and skill in this matter, for children most often bear some likeness to their fathers, and when they are not like 'tis a delicate reflexion upon their honour. And I have found from experience that most ladies have this peculiarity; that they are for ever telling everyone that their children are very like their fathers, and not themselves at all, even when they are nothing of the sort; & the greatest pleasure you can give them is to see the likeness and tell them of it, for then 'tis evident that they have not got them elsewhere, even if in fact they have.

¶ I was once in a great gathering at Court, where there was under discussion the portrait of two daughters of a very great Queen. Every one said his say, as to which parent they resembled, and the upshot was that all agreed they were like their mother. But I, who was the lady's very humble servant, took the affirmative, and said that they were in all points like their father, and that if those present had seen and known him as I did, they would say the same. Whereat the sister of this lady thanked me very heartily & shewed great pleasure; inasmuch as certain of those there had said this by design, so that she might be suspected of a love affair, and of having some dust in her flute, as the saying is; and thus my assertion of the likeness to their father set the matter right. And upon this point: whoever is lover to a lady, and sees children of his own flesh and blood, let him always say they are like their father, whether or no."

It is true that to say they have something of their mother in them will do no harm, as a friend of mine did at Court one day when we were in company with two brothers, favourites of the King," and he was asked

which they were most like, their father or their mother. He answered that the one who was cool-headed was like his father and the hot one like his mother—making this jest at the expense of the mother, who was a hot piece of merchandize; though these two did in fact share out these different humours, cold and hot.

¶ There is another sort of cuckold which comes of the disdain they shew their wives, as I have known several, who had very fair and honest ladies, but laid no store by them, shewing them every mark of contempt. And such of those ladies who were of spirit & good birth, & apt to the business, seeing themselves so scorned, took their revenge by doing the same; and thereupon a fair prompt love-making, and thence to the lists; for, as the Neapolitan refrain has it, *amor non si vince conaltro che con sdegno*.

For (indeed) a fair and honest lady, who knows herself such, and who is scorned by her husband, though she bear him the fondest wifely love in the world, and though she be preached and lectured upon her duty to love him, yet if she has any spirit at all will leave him & find a lover elsewhere to help her little needs and give her solace.

I knew two ladies at Court, sisters-in-law. One had married a favourite and apt courtier, who nevertheless laid no such store by his wife as he should (seeing whence she came), and spoke of her in public as if she had been a very savage, and behaved roughly to her. She bore it patiently for some while, until her husband fell somewhat from favour whereupon, taking the opportunity as it came (for which we may suppose she had been waiting), she paid him back the scorn she had had of him by making him a very pretty cuckold. And her sister-in-law, following her example, did likewise; for she had been married young to a husband who treated her like a chit of a girl, neither loving nor respecting her as he should. But now that she was grown older, feeling her heart stirring within her, and aware that she was beautiful, paid him back in the same coin, & gave him a fair great pair of horns as interest.

Another time I knew a great lord who took to himself two whores (whereof one was a Moor) for his loves & pleasures, & paid no heed to his

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wife, although she wooed him with as much love and wifely fondness as she knew; but he would never look on her with favour, nor give her so much as a kiss with good grace, and of a hundred nights she had of him no more than two. And what could the poor thing have done (after so many indignities) but what she did, & go seek another vacant bed, coupling with another partner and so getting what she needed?

Why could not this husband have done as did another of my acquaintance, who was of such humour that when pressed by his wife (who was very fair, and took pleasure elsewhere also) he answered her fairly: 'Take your pleasure where you will; I give you leave. But if I give you liberty, do you the same with me, and take no stock of my amours, but let me do what I will. I will not hinder your ease & pleasures: do not hinder mine.' And so each went his way and took his joys where he would, one to left and the other to right, and cared nought what the other did—a happy life!

I like as much that other husband who comes to my mind, an old man, impotent, sickly and gout-ridden, who said to his wife (a very fair lady, whom he could not satisfy as she desired): 'I know well enough, my love, that my impotent old age accords ill with your eager youth; and on this account I may very well be odious to you, & 'tis not possible that you can love me altogether, as if I performed all the ordinary offices of a young and vigorous husband. But I have made up my mind to give you full liberty to make love where you would, and borrow some other lover who can serve you better than I; but above all I beg you choose one who is discreet and modest, and who will not bring scandal upon you or upon me, but will give you a couple of pretty children that I can love & bring up as my own; so that everyone may think they are our true and legal children, inasmuch as I have still some vigour in my body, and such appearance as will readily make believe they are my own breeding.'

I leave you to guess whether this fair young wife was glad of this pretty little homily, and the permission to enjoy this pleasant liberty, which she practised so well that she peopled the house in no time with

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two or three pretty little children; wherein the husband thought to have some share, since he touched her sometimes and lay with her, and so he chose to believe it, and let others do the same. And so this husband and wife lived on in joy and felicity, and had a fine family.

¶ And there is another sort of cuckold, who is made so by the pleasing opinion of certain ladies, that there is nothing more right and beautiful, nor more to be commended, than charity. For they say that by this they mean not only giving to the poor and needy, of their goods and plenty, but also helping to extinguish that raging fire ablaze in the hearts of their poor, pining lovers; for what, they say, can be more charitable than to restore the life of one whom we see dying, and to give refreshing ease to one who is so consumed? So also said that gallant knight-errant, the Seigneur de Montauban, who held in defence of the beautiful Ginevra in Ariosto, that she should rightly die who denies life to her lover, not she who gives it.

If thus he spoke of a maiden, with how much greater reason should the like charity be commended in wives than in maids, whose purses are not yet unloosed and open; whereas wives, or some at least among them, have the same, apt and ample, to extend their generosity.

Whereto I recall a tale of a beautiful lady of the Court, who clothed herself at Candlemas-tide in a robe of white damask, and matching this she wore all else of white, so that nothing more pure and beautiful was that day seen. Her gallant gained the ear of one of her companions, likewise a fair lady, but of riper years and wiser speech, well adapted to intercede for him, & while all three were looking at a fine painting of Charity veiled and draped in white, this lady said to her companion: 'To-day you wear the same robe as Charity here: but since you are Charity in your attire, be Charity also towards your lover, for there is naught so laudable as mercy and charity, however it may issue forth, so only that it come of goodwill towards one's neighbour. Have charity therefore; and if you have the fear of marriage and of your husband before your eyes, why, 'tis an idle superstition to which we women should not give way, since nature

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has endowed us with divers treasures, not to use niggardly, like some foul wretch hugging her hoard, but to bestow freely to the hapless poor and the necessitous. For of a truth our chastity is like to a treasure which is not to be squandered on base things, but for that which is great and noble it must be spent liberally and without stint. In like wise should our chastity be spent, freely on those deserving and meritorious, and in great need withal, but denied to the mean, the craven, & those not in want. And as for our husbands, they be fine idols indeed, whereto we devote our vows and our candles and never cast a glance at other handsome images! for it is not to man, but to God alone, that we can vow our soul and body.'

This harangue was not at all displeasing to the lady, and by no more did it offend her gallant, who was presently rewarded for his perseverance. Yet such sermons on charity are indeed dangerous for the poor husbands. I have heard tell (though I will not swear to the truth, nor will I deny it) that when first the Huguenots established their religion, preaching by night and in hidden places, lest they should be surprised, spied out and made to suffer, they were met together in this wise in the Rue de Saint-Jacques in *Paris*, in the time of King Henry II, where certain great ladies, gone thither to receive this charity, were all but caught in the act. When the minister had done his sermon, he exhorted them all to charity, and incontinently they put out the candles, and every brother and sister in Christ fell to dispensing charity each to each, with right good will and puissance. But all this I dare not attest, though there be those who swear it to be the truth, but for all I know it may be naught but lies & imposture.

But this at any rate I know well, how in those days there lived at *Poitiers* a certain lawyer's wife, who was known as the fair Gotterelle, whom I myself have seen, who was one of the loveliest women in the world, gracious and finely-made, and one of the most desirable ladies in the town in those days: all men would gaze after her, and gazing would lose their hearts. One fine day after the service she passed under the hands of a full dozen of students, one after the other, either in the Consistory or under some penthouse, or, as others say, under a gibbet in the Old Market, and

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that without a single protest or refusal, but on the contrary, requiring as a password but the text of the sermon, she received them courteously, one after the other, as her very brothers in Christ. Indeed, she continued giving to them of her bounty long afterwards, yet to no Papist would she lend so much as a groat. Nevertheless there were not a few Papists, who borrowing from their Huguenot companions the password and the sign of the brethren, would take their pleasure with her. Others would resort to the meeting-house, and would make believe to be converted, to learn the trick which would give them delight of this fair lady. In those days I was a young student of *Poitiers*, & more than one good friend of mine who had shared her favour would attest the same; moreover 'twas the talk of all the town. Of a truth this was sweet charity in a most scrupulous lady, thus to favour her brothers in religion!

There is still another form of charity, which is often exercised upon those sorry prisoners who being in gaol are denied the sweets of love: to this end the gaolers' wives and female keepers of the prison, or the châtelaines who in the castles keep guard over prisoners of war, out of pity and a merciful heart give them of their love. Thus said a certain Roman courtesan once to her daughter, of whom a gallant was deep in love, but who would give him not so much as a groat's worth: *E dagli, al manco per misericordia!*¹⁴

So do these gaolers' wives, châtelaines and others, treat their prisoners, who (wretched captives as they be) yet cease not to feel the urge of the flesh much as they knew it in happier times. As the old proverb has it: Longing comes of lacking—& so truly, whether on straw or on the hard ground, Sir Priapus will ever be lifting his head, even as on the finest and softest bed in the whole world.

And hence it is that prisoners and vagrants in their prisons and pest-houses are as lascivious as kings, princes and nobles in their great palaces and fine royal couches.

To point my tale, I would instance a story told to me one day by Captain Beaulieu, the captain of the King's Gallies, of whom I have already

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spoken. He was in the service of the Grand Prior of France, of the house of Lorraine, & was dearly loved by him. One day, going with him aboard a frigate at *Malta*, he was seized by the Sicilian galleys and carried off prisoner to Castel-à-mare at *Palermo*, where he was cast into a foul dungeon, narrow and gloomy, and maltreated for a space of three months. By good fortune the Governor of the Castle, a Spaniard, had two fair daughters, who hearing him bewailing his pitiable plight, one day asked leave of their father to visit him, for the love of God; who freely gave them leave. And since the Captain was truly a gallant fellow, & pleasing of speech, he so won their hearts at their very first visit, that they gained the consent of their father that he should leave his miserable prison, and be placed in a more fitting chamber and receive better treatment. Nor was this all, for they gained leave to visit him freely once every day and talk with him.

This fell out so finely that both were soon in love with him, although he was not handsome, while they were very beautiful. And so giving heed neither to new dolours of imprisonment nor even to the risk of death, but led on by ever greater familiarities, he gave himself with a good heart to the enjoyment of them both, & these delights continued without scandal the while he enjoyed his conquest, during the space of eight months, with no calumny, evil, nor swollen belly, neither surprise nor discovery, for these two sisters were so well at one and so willing each to aid the other and to play sentinel, that naught of ill could befall. And he vowed to me (for he was a close friend of mine) that never in his days of freedom had he had such delight, nor felt for it a keener ardour and appetite, than in his days in prison, which had been a pleasant enough prison for him, although 'tis said that no prison can be pleasant. And this fine time endured for the space of eight months, until the truce made between the Emperor and King Henry II decreed that all prisoners should quit their dungeons and be set free. And he swore that he never grieved so much as at leaving his kindly prison and those fair maids who had shewn him such favour, and who so bewailed his going.

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I asked him if he had had no apprehension of the sorry consequences if he were discovered. He made answer that indeed he had, but that he had no fear of them, for at the worst they could but kill him, & he would sooner have died than have returned to his first prison. Moreover, he feared that if he failed to satisfy these noble ladies, since they sought him so ardently, they would have conceived for him only contempt and disdain and that he would have been treated worse than before; and hence shutting his eyes to all else, he set forth on this pleasant adventure.

Truly one cannot praise too highly these noble and charitable Spanish maids: they are not the first so to do, nor will they be the last.

Many like tales are told in our own land, such as that of the Duke of Arschot, who, when held prisoner in the Bois de Vincennes, escaped by the aid of an honourable lady, who however was like to have suffered for it since 'twas a question of the King's service. And such charity is indeed to be rebuked, which touches the public weal, though fine & commendable where this is not in question. There is little harm where only the lover's life is at stake.

¶ I could give many brave instances of this matter were I desirous of discoursing on it at length, for it would be by no means without entertainment. However I will cite but one, and no more: 'tis an ancient tale and pleasant withal.

We may find in Livy how the Romans totally destroyed the town of *Capua*, after which certain of the inhabitants journeyed to *Rome*, to lay before the Senate their woeful estate, & to beg them to shew some clemency. The question was debated: among those who gave their opinion was Atilius Regulus, who held that they should shew no mercy, for (said he) in all *Capua* he had not been able to discover one who since the revolt of their city could be said to have shewn but the slightest sign of friendship or affection for the Roman State, save only two honourable women; the one Vesta Opia, an Atellane, from the city of *Atella*, then living at *Capua*, & the other Faucula Cluvia, both of whom had at one time been courtesans and ladies of pleasure, publicly plying for hire. The one had

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allowed no single day to pass without prayers and sacrifices for the welfare and victory of the Roman people, and the other had secretly given food and aid to the wretched prisoners of war who were dying in hunger and poverty.

Verily this was fair charity and piety: whereto I recall that one day, when a noble gentleman, an honourable lady, and myself were together reading this passage, on a sudden we fell to arguing that since these two ladies were already so skilled and learned in these kind and pious offices, it might well be that they had not let the matter rest there, but had moreover granted the charity of their sweet bodies, for in times past this had been bestowed often enough on others, since they had been women of the town, and indeed might still be—but the tale does not vouch for this, leaving us in doubt; yet one may take it so. But if this were of a truth their trade, even if they had for a time discarded it, they might resume it lightly and with ease; it may be too that they were still acquainted with some of their old lovers who had bestridden them in former times, & who were ready enough to revive past customs. Or it may be again that among the prisoners some handsome and valiant unknown might find favour in their eyes, and since he well deserved of their bounty, why, what better could they do than grant him joy of their fair bodies? Come what may, these honest ladies were in every way worthy of the courtesy shewn to them by the Roman republic, which restored to them all their goods, to be enjoyed without let or hindrance by them for ever. Nor was this all, for they were informed they might ask what they desired and the same would be granted them. And truth to tell, had Titus Livy been less restrained (as alas he was) by prudery & false shame, he might have spoken the plain truth about the ladies, and said frankly that they were no niggards of their own fair flesh; so would this fragment of history have had the more charm and pleasure in the reading, had he not cut short his tale, leaving the best of it stuck to the point of his pen. Thus spoke we together on this matter.

¶ King John of France, when imprisoned in England, in like manner

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received great favours of the Countess of Salisbury, and so delectable and to his taste did he find them that he could not forbear from returning to visit her, as he had faithfully promised to do.

Other ladies are accommodating in this matter up to a point of conscientious charity, as was one who would never allow her lover, however often he might lie with her, so much as to touch her lips, alleging as her reason that with her lips she had vowed fidelity to her husband, & would not violate her vows by that same mouth which had made them; but as for that of the belly which had spoken no word and made no promise, he might take his pleasure and welcome, nor would she scruple to yield it, since 'tis no privilege of the one to covenant for the other; moreover, the custom of the law exacts that none may pledge himself for another without the consent and acknowledgment of both, nor one alone for all.

Another lady of like conscience and scruple, when surrendering her sweets to her lover, would ever take the upper place and give her man the lower, never by one tittle relaxing this rule, but observed it at all times strictly, for (said she) should her husband or another ask her if such a one had done so and so, she might fairly deny and protest, even upon oath, without offending against the will of God, that he had never done this nor bestridden her. This vow she put into effect so well that she finely convinced her husband and others by her obstinate affirmations when they questioned her; and they believed her, yet (quoth she) never had the wit to ask her if ever she had played the upper, which would have put her in much contempt and disquiet of mind.

It comes to me that I have earlier spoken of this matter, but no man can remember everything. To my mind it is moreover of more relevance here.

Ladies of this sort are in general great liars, and speak not a word of truth; for they are so apt and accustomed to lying (or those that do otherwise are nothing but fools and deserve all they get) to their husbands and lovers on the chances and changes of love, and to swearing that they give naught of themselves to another, that when it befalls them to encounter

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other affairs or arguments of importance, they can still do nothing but lie, and none can believe them.

Other women whom I have known or heard of would not bestow their delights upon a lover unless they were with child, fearing they might conceive of their seed; wherein they made great ado not to father upon their husbands a fruit not theirs, and nourish, sustain and bring it up as their own. But once they were teeming, they saw no offence in cuckolding their husbands by their own prostitution.

It may be that others did the like for the same reasons as did Julia, the daughter of the Emperor Augustus, & wife of Agrippa, who was in her day a notorious strumpet, whereat her father was even more eniaged than her husband. Being asked on one occasion whether she had no fear of becoming pregnant by one of her lovers, she replied: Nay, but I see to that, for I receive no passengers on board my ship but when she is weighty and loaded with cargo.

¶ Here again is another sort of cuckold; and these are verily martyrs, whose wives are as ugly as sin, but who none the less would taste of sweet delights as well as their lovelier sisters, though this should be the meed of these alone, since the proverb has it: Handsome men to the gallows, fair dames to the stews. Yet none the less these ugly trollops play the whore like the others, & one must excuse them, since they too are women of the same kidney, though not so fair. I have known these sluts, at least in their youth, to rate themselves as high as any beauty, for (they held) women were worth just so much as they priced themselves at and would sell themselves for; even as in open market every sort of ware is displayed and sold, some for more, others for less, just as things fall out, according as one may come to market later than the others, or as the prices may go, for, as they say, all men go to the best market, & though their wares may not be of the best, they sell according to the craft of the merchant.

So it is with plain women; though marry, I have known some who were so hot and lascivious, and as apt for love as the fairest, who would market their wares as cunningly and drive as good a bargain as any.

But this is the worst I have observed of them; that whereas the dealer makes his bid for the most beautiful, the plainer damsels will pester the dealer to accept their goods and that for nothing or as cheaply as may be. Nor do they stop at this, for very often they will pay money to whoso frequents their custom and debauches them; and what a sorry thing is this, for it requires no small sum to pay for such debauching, which cost may indeed outweigh the merit of the person & his lecherous spending; moreover, there is no less shame for the poor husband to be cuckolded by an ugly wife, whose ways are less easy to bear with than those of a fairer lady: besides which, it is a weary fate for a man to lie with a she-devil instead of an angel.

On this head I have heard many a brave man maintain that he would rather a wife who was fair but frail than a plain one, though never so chaste, for a plain woman brings naught but vexation and chagrin, while in fair women is all ravishment and delight—as these declare. As for my own opinion, I will leave the matter to those who have journeyed along this road.

I have heard tell of others who held it not so expedient that a wife be chaste; for these rare ladies who are so endowed do flaunt their chastity as though they would lord it not only over their husbands but over heaven itself: Faith, they would seem to think that God owed them some return for their vainglorious chastity. None the less they deceive themselves, for I have heard it of learned doctors that God loves the better a poor sinner, contrite and humble, as was the Magdalen, than these haughty and pretentious dames, who think to have gained Paradise without beseeching mercy of God.

I have heard speak of a lady who vaunted her chastity in such wise that she grew to have a contempt for her husband, and when asked whether she had lain with him: No indeed (said she), but he has lain with me. Indeed a boast to make! I will leave you to imagine how these proud chaste fools lecture their wretched husbands, however little they may have to reproach them with; and in like manner do those who possess both chastity

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and wealth, for a woman who is not only chaste but wealthy in her own right will strut & crow & lord it over her husband, so that by reason of vainglorious boastings of her chastity and her well-defended fore part, naught will content her but she must behave like an Empress, scolding her husband for the least fault; this I have seen in many. If he gambles, spends riotously, or becomes a voluptuary, she will storm and rampage until his home be more like Pandemonium than an orderly household, and if occasion arise when he must sell aught of his goods, either to go to Court or to the wars, or to go to law, or indeed for necessities, or on account of small indiscretions & frivolous pretexts, it is no use his speaking of it, for his wife has assumed such dominion over him, fortified and bolstered up by her virtue, that all must be submitted to her judgment. As Juvenal says truly in his satires:

. . . *Animus uxoris si deditus uni,
Nil unquam invitâ donabis conjuge; vendas,
Hac obstante, nihil haec, si nolit, emetur.*¹⁶

One may see in these lines how nearly the ways of ancient *Rome* corresponded to those of our own day, at least on this point; but when a woman is something of a wanton, she will be found more complaisant, more submissive, pliant and timid, sweeter and gentler in mind, humbler and more willing to perform the wishes of her husband, readier to give and take in all things. Of these I have seen many who dared not scold nor complain, nor be thought peevish, for fear lest their husbands should threaten them with their misdoings, and confront them with their adultery, and pay the penalty with their lives. And should the excellent man wish to sell some of their property, hey presto, and the contract is signed with their names before he shall have said a word. I have seen cases not a few of this sort; in a word, they do what their husbands wish.

Of a truth, then, are these husbands so deeply injured to be cuckolded of such fair wives, when they are so enriched thereby—to say naught of the sweet voluptuous delights of wantoning with these beauties, floating

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(so to say) with them in fair fresh waters rather than in a foul and loathsome quagmire? And since we must all die, as a great captain of my acquaintance used to say, is it not a finer thing to die by a keen fresh sword, sharp, bright and shining, than by a dull blade, old, rusted and unburnished, needing more emery than could be furnished by all the sword-cutlers in the city of *Paris*?

And that which I say of plain young women I would say also of certain old women of lewd desires, who would keep themselves as apt as the fairest (I will speak of this elsewhere in a discourse to itself), and herein is the hurt, for when their husbands cannot satisfy them, what will the jades do but call in assistance, being as lascivious every whit, or even more, than younger dames. These I have seen lacking in ardour early in life and in middle-age, but inflamed later on. And one may truly say that in these things the end is more lecherous than either—or so at least in desire, for their strength and puissance leaves them, to their bitter chagrin; as the ancient saw has it—Pity & grief it is when the breech is fain but strength is failing.

Indeed there are always a few of these poor wretches, who will admit their lovers free, and distribute largesse from both their purses, but it is only the one well plenished which makes the other seem fine and strait. Thus it is said that generosity in all things is more to be commended than avarice and meanness, save only in women, who are despised so much the more for generosity of their bodies, so much the less if they are chary and niggardly.

This was once said by a great lord of two noble ladies, sisters, of whom I knew, one of whom was scrupulous of her honour, and liberal with her purse; the other a true niggard of her purse, but generous enough with her foie part.

¶ Now here again is another sort of cuckold, & one of a certainty hateful and execrable before both God and man, who, enamoured of some young Adonis, make a gift of their wives, looking for favours in return.

The very first time I was in Italy, I heard tell of an example of this at

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Ferrara, the story being of one who, fascinated by a certain handsome young man, persuaded his wife to grant her favours to him, for he was in love with her, and that she should assign a day, and do all that he commanded. The lady was nothing loth desiring to eat of no finer venison than this. At last the day was arranged, & on the very hour that the young man and his lady were engaged in their pleasant delights, the husband, who was concealed, according to the arrangement between himself and his wife, rushed in, & taking them in the act, laid his dagger to the young man's throat, judging his offence to be worthy of death, according to the laws of Italy, which are in this more rigorous than in France. He was thereupon constrained to grant his will to the husband, and one was exchanged for the other: the young man prostituted himself to the husband and the husband delivered his wife up to the young man; thus was he cuckolded, verily in a base fashion.

I have heard a tale that in some corner of the world (which I will not name) there was a husband, a man of rank withal, who was head over ears in love with a young man enamoured of his wife, & she moreover loved him. Now whether the husband schemed it with his wife or whether it was an unexpected surprise, at all events he discovered the pair a-bed and in the very act. Thereupon threatening the young man if he were not complaisant, he entered him then and there, joined and coupled with his wife, and had his pleasure. Whence came a solution of the problem how three lovers may sport and satisfy themselves all at the same time.

I have heard tell of a lady who was madly in love with a fine gentleman whom she had taken for her friend and lover; he being fearful that the husband would play them some evil trick, she reassured him, saying: Nay, fear not, for he dare do nothing, being afraid lest I should accuse him of having wished to try with me the *Venus Posterior*; and this might well cause his death if I were to drop the faintest hint and denounce him to justice. So do I hold him in check and in apprehension, and fearing my accusation he dare not say a word.

Truly such an accusation would have imperilled nothing less than the

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wretched husband's life; for the lawyers say that sodomy is punishable if only in desire to commit it: but maybe the lady had no wish to give away the whole matter, and it would not have come to this without her stopping to consider.

I have heard how a few years ago a young French gentleman, a handsome fellow such as is often seen at Court, having gone to *Rome* to become proficient in manly exercises, like many another, was so favourably regarded and so much admired for his beauty, as much by men as women, that people would almost have resorted to force; and so whenever they knew he was going to mass or to some public place or assembly everyone would be there to see him; indeed, many husbands would permit their wives to give him a tender assignation in their own houses, so that once he was come, and surprised, an exchange might be made, the husband of his wife, the other of himself. Wherefore he was wained never to comply with the wishes of these ladies, since all had been contrived and schemed as a trap; in which he shewed himself wise, and preferred his honour and clean conscience to these brutish pleasures, wherein he was held worthy and in great esteem. However, he was in the end murdered by his squire. Many differing tales are told of the reason; but come what may, 'twas indeed a pity, for he was a fine young gallant, of good birth, and one who promised well both in nobility of appearance & of action; for, as I have heard a very gallant man of my time put it, which is indeed true, neither a bardash nor a catamite was ever brave, valiant, or generous, except only the great Julius Cæsar, since all such shameful creatures are by divine ordnance degraded and put to shame. Wherein I marvel greatly how many, whom I have known to be sullied with this shameful vice, are permitted by Heaven to attain to great prosperity; yet the Judgment awaits them, and in the end they will surely be seen to reap their reward.

Truly, I have heard tell of many husbands stained to their souls in this abominable vice, for, wretched shameful creatures, they have become more used to approach their wives by the rear than in front, and use this latter only in order to have children, so treating their poor wives, whose

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ardour is all in the fair parts in front. And are they not to be excused if they cuckold these husbands who love their foul & unclean hinder parts?

How many women there are in the world, who, were they examined by doctors, surgeons, or midwives, would be found virgin neither behind nor before, and who could proceed against their husbands by law at any moment; who dissimulate & dare not expose the thing, lest they should bring scandal on themselves and their husbands; or, it may be, they take greater pleasure in it than we may think; or again, for the purpose of which I have spoken, to keep their husbands in such subjection that should they make love elsewhere, their husbands must perforce permit it, as some indeed do. But however that matters little.

The *Summa Benedicti* says: If the husband wishes to choose his part contrary to the law of nature, he commits a mortal sin; and if he upholds that he may dispose of his wife as he pleases, he falls into the foul and shameful heresy of certain Jews and impious Rabbis, of which it is said that *duabus mulieribus apud synagogam conquestis se fuisse a viris suis cognitu sodomico cognitatas, responsum est ab illis rabinis: virum esse uxoris dominum, proinde posse uti ejus utcomque libuerit, non aliter quam is que piscem emit: ille enim, tam anterioribus quam posterioribus partibus, ad arbitrium vesci potest.*

I have quoted this in Latin without translation, for it has an ill sound in chaste and honest ears. Shameful that they are! so to leave that which is sweet, pure and lawful, and choose instead that which is ugly, unclean, foul and unlawful, and vicious withal!

But when the man wishes so to take the woman, she is allowed by law to separate from him, if no other means be found to correct him: and yet it is said that those who fear God should never agree thereto, but should sooner cry out against it, caring not for the scandal which should come of that, neither for the dishonour or the fear of death; for (says the law) it is better to die than to consent to evil. And this also says the same book, which I find very strange: that in whatever way a husband may have carnal knowledge of his wife, so only that she may conceive thereby, it is no mortal sin, but venial only. Yet indeed there are ways to do this which

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are truly shameful and unclean, according as Aretino represents them in his figures: and there is nothing of marital chastity here, although, as I have said, it might be permitted with teeming women & also with those whose breath is strong and foul, either from the mouth or from the nose: whereto I have heard tell of many women whose breath when one inhaled it or kissed them was as bad as a privy-hole; or again, as I have heard it told of a certain great lady, indeed I might say a very great lady, that one of her ladies said one day that her breath was as foul as a brass chamber-pot; she used these very words. One of her closest friends, who was very intimate with her, confirmed this to me; though it is true that she was then a little advanced in years.

In like cases what can a husband or a lover do if he have not recourse to some extravagant posture? But above all let it not come to *Venus posterior*.

I would say more, were it not for my horror of speaking of it; indeed it grieves me to have already said so much; but it is sometimes necessary to lay bare the vices of the world so that they be corrected.

I would now speak of the ill-repute in which many held and still hold the Court of our Sovereigns; whereto they say that both maidens & wives transgress, and that customarily. But in this they are often deceived, for here there are chaste, honourable & virtuous women to be found, indeed, more than elsewhere, and here will virtue abide, oftener than in all other places, where it should be the dearer prized, so well-proven it is.

I will cite here but this one story of the present Grand Duchess of Florence, of the House of Lorraine, who being come to *Florence* on her marriage-night, the Grand Duke desired to lie with her and have her maidenhead. Hence he first had her to make water in a fine crystal urinal, the fairest and clearest to be found, and having seen the urine, he consulted with his physician, a very great personage, learned and highly skilled, to know of him from this examination whether or no she were virgin. The physician, having studied it fixedly and with an air of great wisdom, declared that she was as pure as when she came from her mother's

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womb, so that the Duke might boldly proceed, for he would find no open road, nor any beaten track. and this he did, and found it to be the very truth. Whereupon he cried out next morning in amazement. 'Indeed a miracle, that the girl should have come virgin from the Court of France.' A strange business and a curious idea! I know not if it be true, but it has been told to me as truth.

A fine character for our Court; yet it is not only in these times, but long ago, that all the ladies of the Court and of *Paris* were held to be less virtuous of their bodies than those of the countryside, who never stirred from their homes. Men have been known so scrupulous as not to espouse girls or women who were much travelled, or who had had even a little glimpse of the world. So in our own *Guyenne*, when I was a young man, I have heard many gallant gentlemen declare that they would wed no girl or woman who should have passed the Port de Pille and journeyed into France. Poor fools they were in this, however skilled or gallant in other matters, to dream that cuckoldry might not lurk in their own houses, at their own hearths and in their own chambers and closets, as well or even better (considering the opportunities) than in royal palaces & great royal towns. For could not their wives be cajoled, entreated, supplicated and sought out either when they themselves were at the Court, at the wars or at the chase, going about their journeys or their business, without their perceiving it; yet they were so simple as to believe that none would dare to speak of love, as well as of household affairs, of gardens, of hunting and hawking; and so by their blindness and credulity would get themselves made greater cuckolds than ever; for all the world over, a fair and witty woman, and by the same token a fine and gallant man, knows very well how and when to make love. Poor fatuous fools! could they not conceive that Venus has no fixed place of dwelling, as of old in *Cyprus*, in *Paphos* and *Amathos*, but that she dwells everywhere, down to the very herdsmen's cots, and in the bosoms of even the most simple-seeming shepherdesses?

But for some long while they have begun to lose these foolish notions,

for becoming aware that this sad fate of cuckoldry lurked everywhere, they have taken wives wherever it has pleased them and wherever possible. Some moreover have done even better, for they have sent them or taken them to Court, to shew their charms and to make conquests, that they might be envied of one or another—as though they courted the gift of a pair of horns!

Others there are who bring their wives to plead and solicit for them in lawsuits, of which some have no such business, but make believe they have. or if indeed they have, they will so prolong it as to prolong their intrigues. Faith, the husbands will often leave their wives alone at the courts, in the galleries or great halls, & then return to their homes, trusting that so they will best get their business achieved and their cases won; and of a truth I have known many who won them thus, rather by the skill and beauty of their wives than by their own right, who often thus would be got with child; & so to prevent scandal (if drugs failed in their potency in preventing this) they would hasten home to their husbands, feigning that they must consult some titles or documents which are needed, or to make some enquiry, or to await Martinmas, since during the vacation they can do no more, & may well return to see their households & their husbands. And so indeed they return, but of a surety they return fruitful.

I would make bold to ask not a few judges, counsellors and presidents: have they not enjoyed many a dainty tit-bit of the wives of these gentlemen?

I knew not long ago a great lady, very fair and honest, who went thus to plead her case in *Paris*, where one was heard to say: 'What does she hope to do? She will lose it; she has not a good claim.' But marry, did she not carry as her claim a fine fair belly, as Cæsar carried his on the point of his sword?

Thus do the law courts see these gentlemen made cuckold, in reward for the cuckolds they themselves make in their amours with the wives of judges and presidents. And many a one of these have I seen whose charms, were they displayed, might well outshine those of the wives and

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daughters of lords, knights & noble gentlemen of the Court, & the like.

I used to know a great lady, once very fair, but whose beauty was somewhat dimmed by age. Having a lawsuit on in *Paris*, and seeing that her beauty would no more aid her in pleading and winning her case, she took with her a certain neighbour of hers, young and very fair, providing her for this purpose with a large sum of money (about ten thousand crowns); and that which not all her willingness could do for herself she procured from this fair lady, with whom she was greatly pleased, as was the lady herself, though in a different fashion.

It is no long time since I saw a lady take thither one of her daughters, and that although she was married, entirely to aid her in winning her case, and nothing else: and of a truth she is very beautiful, and skilled in argument of this sort.

But it is high time I ceased this long discourse on cuckoldry, for in the end my long periods, cast adrift on these deep waters and raging torrents, would be drowned, and I should never be done, nor would I have more skill to extricate myself from this than from that Labyrinth of old time, though I should have the longest and stoutest thread in all the world for guide and safe conduct.

¶ Lastly I will conclude by saying that if we do harm, bestowing torments, martyrdom and every sort of evil upon these wretched cuckolds, our folly may be like to cost us dear, since we may have to pay for it through the nose (as the saying is), and three times over; for the greater part of their persecutors, being these gallants who make illicit love, suffer fully as great ills, for they are more given to jealousy, since they have a husband as rival, as well as the others: they endure anxiety and caprice, risking the dangers of death, of injuries and hurts, of affronts, insults, quarrels, fears, pain and death itself; they must brave cold, rain, wind and heat. All this, to say nothing of pox, chancres, ills and maladies which they may incur, as well with great ladies as with those low born; inasmuch as they may often pay so dearly for the favours they are given that the game is not worth the candle.

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Many of these have we seen to die wretchedly, when they were pressing on to conquer a whole kingdom; witness M. de Bussi, the hero of his age, and many another.

I could give numbers of others, but I will name no more, so that I may have done, with but this warning to lovers, that they should act according to the Italian proverb: *Che molto guadagna chi putana perde!*³⁷

Amé, the second Count of Savoy, used often to say:

In the game of war and the game of love
For a single joy a hundred griefs.

He used also to say that love and anger are dissimilar in this; that anger will pass from a man swiftly and easily, but not so love.

Hence should we guard ourselves against love, for it will ever cost us more dear than it is worth, and will lead to many sorrows. And truth to tell, the greater part of patient cuckolds have an hundred-fold better time than the lovers, so only they recognise their position and come to a good understanding with their wives. Aye, & I have seen many who in spite of their horns, would make a jest of us and laugh at all the humours and droll customs of us who made love to their wives; and this too when we had to do with cunning women, who would contrive with their husbands to our despite. Where to I once knew a brave and honourable gentleman who had long loved a fair & honest lady, & had had the joy of her which he had so long desired. But perceiving one day that his lady and her husband were making game of some trait of his, he took the thing with such ill humour that he left her, and that for good; for making a long voyage to divert his fancy he never spoke with her more, so he told me. And truly one must beware of such wily, exacting and fickle ladies as of a savage beast; for to content and satisfy their husbands they will leave their old lovers, and afterwards take others, since they can by no means entirely discard them.

I have also known a great and honourable lady, who yet had this misfortune, that of five or six lovers whom in my time I have seen her to have,

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each died one after the other, wherefore she bore great grief. And on this score men said of her that she was Sejanus' horse, since all who bestrode her died, and scarce one survived; Yet had she this merit and virtue, that whoever it might be, she would never change towards any of her friends while living, nor abandon them; but once dead, she was ever willing to take a new mount rather than to go afoot. Moreover, as the lawyers declare, one's estate and lands may be given in charge of whosoever one wills, once their first master quits them. Such constancy in this lady was greatly to her credit, yet she is but one firm in her faith among a whole host of faithless dames.

But in plain words, it is not good to grow old in the same hole, and no man of spirit ever did so: one must adventure boldly in all directions, in love as in war, and in many other things. For if one trusts to a single anchor in one's ship, and this become unhooked, it is easily lost, the more when one is in an open sea and a storm and more exposed to squalls and heavy weather than in the calm of a port.

And in what greater and more perilous sea could a man set forth and sail than in vowing his love to one lady alone? For if she have not been of herself full of wiles and cunning at the beginning, yet do we make her so apt and dexterous by our practices with her, whereby we often suffer ourselves, having fashioned and equipped her so that she may make war on us. So it is better, as some gallant gentleman has said, to espouse some fair and honest dame, though one may risk a touch of the horns withal, and these woes of cuckoldry common to most, than to endure so many ills in making other cuckolds. This however is contrary to the opinion of M. du Gua, who when I made a proposal one day on behalf of a great lady, who had begged me to do so, replied only that he had thought me one of his greatest friends, but I had made him doubt it by this proposal, hounding him into the thing he most detested, that was that he should marry and be made cuckold, instead of cuckolding others: moreover that he could wed many women every year, speaking of marriage as a secret prostitution of one's reputation and liberty, ordained by law. Whereto

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the worst was, as I myself could see and take note, that the greater part, not to say all, of those whose delight is to make others cuckold, when they themselves marry, they infallibly fall into the married state, which is that of cuckoldry. Nor have I ever seen it happen otherwise, according to the proverb: As you do unto others, so it shall be done unto you.

¶ Before I make an end, I would say one word more: that I have known a dispute raised which is yet undetermined: in what provinces & regions of Christendom and in Europe are there most cuckolds and whores? Men say that in Italy the ladies are most ardent, and therefore greater whores, as M. de Beze puts it in an epigram, to the effect that where the sun is hottest & most powerful, there it gives greater heat to women, & making use of the line:

*Credibile est ignes multiplicare sous.*³⁸

Spain is in like case, though it lies farther West; yet there the sun inflames ladies as well as in the East.

The Flemish, the Swiss, German, English and Scotswomen, isasmuch as they dwell more towards the North, which is a colder region, shal e no less in this natural warmth, and truly I have known them as hot as dames of any other nation.

The Greeks have reason to be so, for they are far to the East. Thus in Italy men desire *Greca in letto*: that is, a Greek bedfellow, for of a surety there is much in them that is alluring & seductive, since in time past they were not without cause the delight of the whole world, & imparted many a secret to the dames of Italy and Spain, from old time up till now; so much indeed that these almost surpass their mistresses, ancient & modern. And truly, was not Venus, the Queen & Empress of all harlots, a Greek?

As for our fair women of France, in times past they have been known to be very coarse, contenting themselves with gross & unseemly fashions; but in the last fifty years or so they have borrowed and learned from other nations so much gentleness and delicacy, so much attraction and charm in their clothes, in their fair looks & wanton ways, or it may be that they

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themselves have been at pains to model themselves so, that now none can deny that they surpass all other women in every respect; & indeed I have heard even strangers declare them to be more delightful than any others; moreover the wanton language of love is in French more wanton, more exciting and sweeter sounding, than in other tongues.

And more than all, this blessed liberty which we have in France, and which is more precious than aught else, renders our women more desirable and captivating, more tractable and easy of access than all others; and further, adultery is not so generally punished as in other lands, by the wisdom of our good Councils and our lawgivers who, seeing that mischief may arise through harsh punishment, have a little relaxed the same and altered the rigorous laws of an earlier time, passed by men who allowed themselves full liberty of action while denying it to their wives. Indeed, no innocent woman was permitted to accuse her husband of adultery, by any law imperial or canon, as Cajetan assures us. But this law was first made by crafty men for reasons given in the following verses:

*Perche, di quel che Natura concede
Cel' vieti tu, dura legge d'onore.
Ella a noi liberal largo ne diede
Com' agli altri animai legge d'amore.
Ma l'huomo fraudulento, e senza fede,
Che fu legislator di quest' errore,
Vedendo nostre forze e buona schiena,
Copri la sua debolezza con la pena."*

In a word, it is good to make love in France. I call to witness our legitimate doctors in the art, & moreover our courtesans, who are wiser in the matter than I. And to tell the very truth: there are wantons in every land, and likewise cuckolds, as I can very well prove, since I have visited all the countries I have cited, and others also; and I have observed that chastity abides not in one region more than in another.

¶ Now I would wish to put this question, and no more, which it may

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be has never yet been sought into by any, nor perhaps even thought of: whether two ladies in love with one another (as has been seen often and still is seen to-day), a-bed together, and doing what is called *donna con donna* (lady with lady), following after the learned Sappho the Lesbienne, can commit adultery, and between them make their husbands cuckold.

Certainly, if one may believe Martial in Epigram cxix of his first book, they do commit adultery: in this he introduces and speaks of a woman named Bassa, a tribad, censuring her for that men were never seen to visit her, so that she was taken to be a second Lucretia; but by and bye she came to be discovered, for she was seen continually to accost women and girls of rare beauty, and it came to light that she herself served them and counterfeited the man and the act of adultery, and joined herself with them, using, as the poet says, *geminos committere cunnos*. And later on, with much protest, he gives the riddle to be guessed, in this line of Latin:

Hic, ubi vir non est, ut sit adulterium.

‘A strange business,’ says he, ‘that where no man is, yet is there adultery.’

I used to know a courtesan of *Rome*, a cunning old hag if ever there was one, called Isabella de Lune, a Spaniard, who took to herself in this sort of intimacy a courtesan named Pandora, one of the most beautiful in all *Rome*. This same Pandora later on married a butler in the household of the Cardinal d’Armaignac, without, however, discarding her earlier profession, while Isabella maintained her and commonly slept with her; and lewd and dissolute in speech as she was, I have often heard her declare that she made her even more wanton, and made her to give her husband more horns than all the ruffians she had ever had. I cannot tell what she meant by this, unless it were founded on this Epigram of Martial.

It is said that Sappho of *Lesbos* was a very great mistress of this art, & perhaps (some say) its inventress; in which in later times the Lesbian ladies imitated her, and the practice endures to this day. As Lucian says: Of such a humour are the women of *Lesbos* that they will suffer no man, but woo other women just as men do. And such women as love this

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practice will not suffer men, but will give themselves to other women, and are named *tribads*, a word derived from the Greek.

Juvenal also speaks of these women when he says, ‘. . . *frictum Grissantis adorat*,’⁴⁰ speaking of a certain tribad who loved and adored one Grissas.

That pleasant fellow Lucian has a chapter on the same subject, & says therein that women come together mutually to join like men, joining with strange, monstrous and lascivious instruments, which are made sterile. And the name of *tribad*, which is otherwise rarely used of these fictionists, is used everywhere freely in his books: he says, too, that these women must be like Philænis, who used to imitate the action of certain love-making where the woman plays the man’s part. None the less he adds that it is far better for a woman to be addicted to libidinous desires to play the male than for a man to play the woman, of so little courage and nobility does such a one shew himself. But the woman, according to this, who thus counterfeits man, might have the reputation of being more valiant and courageous than another; and thus have I known some to be, as much in body as in spirit.

Elsewhere Lucian introduces two ladies conversing of this form of love; one asks the other if such a one had been in love with her, and if she had slept with her and what she had done to her. The other answered freely. ‘First she kissed me as men do, not only lips to lips, but also opening the mouth (meaning pigeon-kissing, with the tongue in the other’s mouth), yet though she had no virile member, but was like the rest of us, she assured me that she had the affections, inclinations, and all else virile; and then I embraced her like a man, and she me, kissing me until I was faint with pleasure; and it seemed to me that she found in it delight beyond measure, and cohabited with me in a certain fashion much more agreeable than with a man.’ That is Lucian’s story.

Now by all I have heard, there are in many places and in many lands numbers of such dames and Lesbians in France, in Italy and Spain, Turkey, Greece and other places. And where women are confined and have

not entire liberty, this practice becomes very strong; for women with such ardour in their bodies must (they say) make use of this remedy to refresh themselves a little, lest they become all on fire.

The Turkish women go to the baths more for this wantonness than for anything else, and are greatly addicted thereto. Even the courtesans, who have men at their call and at any hour, still use this manner of friction, wooing and making love one with another, as I have heard tell of many in Italy & in Spain. In our own country such women are common enough; yet folk say it is no long time since they first were given to it, and even that the fashion was brought from Italy by a dame of high rank whom I will not name.

I have heard a tale of the late M. de Clermont-Tallard the younger, who died at *La Rochelle*, that when he was a boy he had the honour to be companion with M. d'Anjou, later King Henry III, in his studies, and to study with him regularly, under the tutorship of M. de Gournay: one day at *Toulouse*, studying with his tutor in his closet, & sitting in a corner a little withdrawn, he saw through a tiny crack (for the closets & chambers were made of wood, and had been put up on the spur of the moment and in haste by the orders of the Cardinal d'Armagnac, the Archbishop of that See, the better to receive and accommodate the King and all his Court) in another closet, two very great ladies, all exposed, with their drawers down, lying one on top of the other, kissing like doves, practising friction and rubbing, in a word exciting each other, wantoning and imitating men; and their frolic endured near a full hour, when they were so hot and wearied out that they remained very red and sweating, though the weather was cold, and could do no more but were constrained to rest themselves a little. And he said that he watched this game played on several other days, so long as the Court remained there, in the same fashion, and once again he had the opportunity of viewing this sport, so much adapted for it was this particular place, but elsewhere he could not see it.

He told me still more, which I dare not write, and named the ladies concerned. I know not if it be true; but he has sworn it to me a hundred

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times with good round oaths. And indeed, it may very well be true; for these two ladies were ever reputed to make love after this fashion, and thus to pass their time.

I have known many others who have written of the same fashion of love, amongst whom I have heard a tale of a lady of the great world, whose inclinations in this way were excessive, and who loved several ladies, paying court to them and serving them with even more zeal than a man, and making love to them as a man to his mistress: moreover she would take them with her, entertaining them at bed and at board, and giving them all they would. Her husband was complaisant and well content in this, as were many other husbands of my acquaintance, being well satisfied that their wives should pursue these loves rather than those of men (not dreaming their wives to be so wild and wanton). But my belief is that they were much deceived; for, by all I have ever heard, these little pleasures are no more than an apprenticeship for the greater delights with men; since, after they have become so ardent & heated one with another their desire lessens not at all for that, and they must needs bathe in clear running water, which revives far better than still water. Likewise have I learned of good surgeons, and have observed it also myself, that he who wishes to stanch and heal a wound must not anoint it and wash it round the edges and on the border; but must examine it to the bottom, probing and sounding it in order to cure it.

How many of these Lesbians have I seen, who for all their rubbings & frictions together, yet cease not their delights with men! Even Sappho, the supreme mistress of the art, did she not at the last fall in love with her dear friend Phaon, for whose sake she died? For truly, as I have heard many fair dames to avow, these sports can be no rival to men; & all their delights with other women serve for naught but to whet the appetite for a fine bout with men, and these pastimes serve only when they lack men. For should an opportunity come to hand without scandal, they will right soon leave their companions & throw their arms round some man's neck.

I knew of old two fair and honest young ladies of good family, cousins,

who having shared the same bed for the space of three years, were much addicted to this habit, wherefore coming to imagine that this pleasure was meagre and imperfect compared to that with men, they both set themselves to taste the other, and became out and out whores: and afterwards used to confess to their lovers that nothing had so debauched and inflamed them as this custom of theirs, which they grew to hate as the sole cause of their downfall. Yet nevertheless, whenever they met together, or with other women, they would forever continue to taste again this old habit, to whet their desires with men. Whereto I recall the words of an honourable damsel of my acquaintance when her lover asked her one day whether she did not so with her friend with whom she generally slept. 'No, no!' said she, laughing, 'I love men too well.' Yet she did both the one and the other.

I know of an honourable gentleman, who on a time desiring at Court to seek in marriage a certain honourable lady, asked the advice of one of her kinswomen. She told him frankly that he was only wasting his time; moreover, she told me herself, that a certain lady (whose name she gave, and of whom I had heard much gossip) would never allow her to wed. Whereupon I saw at once how matters stood, for I knew very well that she maintained this damsel at bed and board for her own pleasure, and for this reason kept her carefully. The gentleman, thanking the said relative for this good advice, made merry over the matter, saying that she spoke as much for herself as for the other, for she would secretly take her little pleasures also. But this she did gainsay.

This puts me in mind of others who have the habit of keeping harlots of their own, whom they love so dearly that they would not share them for all the wealth in the world, neither with Prince nor noble, not even with their companion or friend, so consumed with jealousy are they, unlike a churl with his drinking-barrel, who will at least give anyone a sip. But this lady would keep the damsel all to herself, giving others nothing: yet none the less the girl would cuckold her by stealth with some of her companions.

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It is said that weasels are touched with this fashion of love, and take pleasure in joining and habiting together, female with female, likewise in hieroglyphics, women drawn together in this fashion were of old time portrayed as weasels. I have heard tell of a lady who was in the habit of keeping weasels, for she herself was of like amorous turn, and so took pleasure in watching the intercourse of the little creatures.

I will go on to recount the tale of two ladies of the Court, who loved each other so madly and were so ardent in their sport that in whatever place they might be they could in no wise prevent themselves from bestowing some sign or kiss of love, whence came much scandal and a deal of food for thought on the part of men. One was widowed, the other married; and one great fête day, when the married one was decked out and robed in a magnificent gown of cloth of silver, their mistress having gone to vespers, they withdrew to her closet, & seated on her commode they fell to their play with such ardour and violence that it broke beneath them. The married dame, being the lower, fell backward with her fair gown of silver right across the filth of the basin, so that she soiled and befouled herself in such a manner that she could do naught but wipe herself down as best she could, tuck her skirts round her & hasten to her chamber—though indeed she was observed and tracked by the foul stench. And hence a deal of merriment among those who heard the story. moreover, it came even to the ears of her mistress, who though she followed the same way herself, was mightily amused. In truth their ardour must indeed have overcome them, that they could not await a fitter time and place, whence scandal would not have come. Yet we may excuse these virgins and widows who love pleasures so vain and foolish, preferring so to devote themselves and spend their heat, rather than to take pleasure with men, whence they may conceive and come to dishonour, or have resort to abortion, as many have and still do: for thus they think not so to offend God, nor to be so wanton as with men, since there is a difference between casting water into a vessel and merely sousing it on the outside and around the rim, but to this they must bear witness and not I, who am

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neither their judge nor their husband. These indeed it may not please, though faith, I have seen none who were not complaisant enough when their wives fell in love with their women friends, and right willing that they should be adulterous, but after this fashion; and certes, such cohabitation is very different from that with men, and (whatever Martial may say) in this they are not cuckolded. For this is no scriptural text, but a foolish poet's notion. Where to (as Lucian says) it is a fine thing that a woman be virile and a true amazon, than that a man be effeminate, as was Sardanapalus or Heliogabalus, or their like, for the more she takes after a man the more courageous will she be. But in all this I must defer to the opinion of the wise.

Once when M. de Gua & I were together reading a little Italian book called the *Book of Beauty*, written in the form of a dialogue by Signor Angelo Fiorentzolle, a Florentine, we fell upon a passage where he states that certain females created by Jupiter in the beginning were so made by nature that some are bound to love men, and some the beauty of one another. but of these some will love purely & chastely, an example of which we see in our own time (says the author) in the famous Marguerite of Austria, who loved the fair Laodomie Fortenguerre; others again will love with wanton lasciviousness, as Sappho the Lesbienne, and in Rome in our own time the great courtesan Cecilia of Venice. The last of their very nature hate marriage, and fly the conversation of men whenever they can.

Whereupon M. de Gua protested, declaring it to be false that the beautiful Marguerite loved this lady with a pure & saintly affection; for since she had devoted herself rather to her than to others of like beauty and virtue, it could only be supposed that it was in order to pleasure herself; and to disguise her own concupiscence she would say and publish abroad that she loved her chastely, much as we see in others, who dissemble their impure loves by such words.

This was at any rate M. de Gua's opinion, & should any wish to probe further into the matter, faith! let him do so.

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This fair Marguerite was in her day one of the loveliest Princesses in Christendom. Now beauty and beauty will ever come together in some fashion of love, but wanton more often than otherwise. She was married three times; first to King Charles VIII; then to John, son of the King of Aragon; and thirdly to the Duke of Savoy, surnamed the Handsome, and folk called them the finest pair and the most beautiful couple in all the world. But the Princess had little joy of this union, for he died very young in the heyday of his beauty, whence she was consumed with sorrow, and for this reason never re-married.

She it was who had built the fine church near *Bourg en Bresse*, one of the fairest & noblest buildings in Christendom. She was aunt to the Emperor Charles, to whom she rendered much assistance, for she was ever for the cause of peace, as was shewn in the matter of the treaty of *Cambrai*, when she and the Queen Regent were met together there. Whereto I have heard from old men & women that it was a fair sight to see the two noble Princesses together.

Cornelius Agrippa has written a little treatise on virtue in women, and all in praise of this same Marguerite. The book is a very fine one, and indeed it could not well be other on so fine a subject, written by such an author (for he was a personage of great repute).

I have heard it said of a noble Princess that among all her maids of honour, she loved one above and beyond all the rest; at which folk marvelled, for others there were who excelled her in all things; but at last it was discovered that she was a hermaphrodite, which gave her the means of pleasure without any inconvenience or scandal. That is quite another matter than with these tribads, for the delight was more pleasurable and piercing.

I have heard tell of a certain great lady that she also was a hermaphrodite, & was furnished with a virile member, though small enough; albeit she has more of the woman about her, for I have thought her very fair. I have known certain great doctors who had seen many such, and all of great lubricity.

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But I will say no more on the subject of this chapter, though I might with ease make it a thousand times longer, having matter so copious and lengthy that if all the cuckolds and the wives who make them so were to hold hands & make a circle, marry, I do believe it would be great enough to go round the greater half of the earth.

¶ In the time of King Francis there was an old song which I have heard repeated by an honourable dame of great age, which is an:

But when shall come the weather
That cuckolds meet together,
Then mine will go in front, the banner for to bear,
The rest shall follow after, and yours bring up the rear.
A great assembly there will be,
A long long train we then shall see.

None the less I would cast no scandal upon those honest & sober wives who comport themselves virtuously and constantly in the faithful vow taken toward their husbands, in praise of whom I hope to devote a separate chapter which will give the lie to Master Jean de Mun," who in his *Roman de la Rose* thus declares that every woman is:

Whether now or of yore,
In deed or desire, a whore.

Whence he excited such hostility in the ladies of the Court in those days that they plotted together, with the sanction of the Queen, & undertook one day to thrash him. They stripped him stark naked, and as they were about to strike he begged that at least the greatest whore of them all should give the first blow; whereupon each one for very shame dare not begin, and so he escaped the lash. I have seen this story portrayed in an antique tapestry among the ancient furniture of the Louvre.

I like as much that tale of a certain preacher who one day preaching to a cheerful company, inveighed against the manners of certain women and their husbands who suffered that these should make them cuckold,

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and cried out: 'Yes, indeed, I know them, I see them, and I am going to throw these two stones at the head of the greatest cuckolds here,' and as he made believe to throw, not a man of the congregation but ducked his head, or put his cloak, or his cape, or his arm before him, to ward off the blow. Whereupon the preacher, restraining them, said: 'What did I tell you! I had thought there to be but two or three cuckolds in my congregation; but from what I have seen there is never a man of you that is not.'

Now whatever these madmen may say, there are very many chaste & honest women who, were they set to fight it out with their opposites, would carry off the victory not by strength of numbers but by virtue alone, which with ease can combat and vanquish its contrary.

And if this said Master Jean de Mun blames those who are whores in desire, to my mind he should rather praise and exalt them to the skies, since they burn so ardently in body and soul, and by forswearing the deed itself thus display their virtue, desiring rather to burn and consume themselves in their own fires and flames, like that rare bird the phoenix, than to forfeit and smirch their honour, resembling in this the white ermine, which would sooner die than befoul itself (the device of a noble dame whom I knew, but something lacking in practice), since it lies in their power to better this state of affairs; yet they nobly deny themselves, moreover there is no fair virtue nor victory greater than that over one's self. Whereto we may find a fine tale in the *Cent Nouvelles* or Hundred Tales of the Queen of Navarre, of that honourable dame of *Pampeluna*, who being wanton both in heart and soul and burning for the love of M. de Avennes, a very handsome Prince, chose rather to die in her heat of desire than seek a remedy, as she herself told him with her dying breath.

This fair and honest lady thus sought an unjustified and undeserved death; and as I have heard said of the matter by an honourable lady and gentleman, this could not have been without offence to God, since she could well have saved herself from death. But so to pursue & precipitate it herself may truly be named suicide—whereto there be many of her

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sort who by great continence and abstinence from the pleasures of the flesh, encompass the death of both their soul and body.

I have been instructed by a great physician (whom I believe to have given the like precepts & advice to not a few honourable ladies) that the human body can rarely if ever enjoy good health unless all its parts and members, from the greatest to the least, perform in unison those functions which the wisdom of nature has decreed for the health of all, making a common harmony like a concert of music, there being no cause why certain parts and members should work while the others are idle. So touching the body politic it is necessary that all officers, artisans, workmen and the rest perform their tasks unanimously, without indolence or shuffling their work on to others; so that all may go well & the commonwealth remain sound and healthy. Likewise it is with the human body.

These fair ladies, harlots in spirit yet chaste in body, deserve eternal praise; yet not those who are as cold as marble, weak, cowardly, and immovable as a rock, lacking in ardour and warmth of feeling (though few of such there be), who are neither fair nor desired of men, but, as the poet says,

Casta quam nemo rogavit

chaste, since wooed of none. Whereto I once knew a great lady who used to say to those of her companions who were beautiful: 'Of a truth God has had mercy on me in that he has not made me fair like you, ladies. For then I should have been loved even as you are loved, and been a harlot even as you.' And hence we should commend as they deserve these beauties who yet are chaste, since such is their true bias.

Yet we are often deceived in such women: for some there are so affected, of such woeful or humble seeming, so cold and discreet of mien, so modest and austere in their words and their plain attire, that one would take them either for saints or prudes; who are in truth and in their hearts, aye, and in their deeds as well, very whores.

Others again we see who by their complaisance and playful words,

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their gay movements and fashionable modish attire, might be deemed of easy virtue, prone to give themselves on the spur of the moment; yet in the world's eye they are chaste and decorous enough of their bodies: in secret, one can but guess at the hidden truth.

I could cite many an example which I have seen and heard of; but I will content myself with this one only, which is given in Livy, and still more finely in Boccaccio, of a fair Roman lady named Claudia Quinta, who had the habit of appearing in *Rome* in robes of great magnificence and little modesty, and whose gay free carriage, so much more worldly than was seemly, acquired for her but an ill reputation. But when the day came for the festivities of the goddess Cybele, all blame was lifted from her, for she had the honour & glory above all others to receive the image of the goddess out of the ship and to handle it and transport it to the town, whereat all men stood amazed, for it had been proclaimed that the man and woman of greatest honesty were alone fit to discharge this office. Wherein we see how far the world may be deceived in women. One must first know them well & examine their conduct before judging one sort as well as the other.

And now, before I make an end of this subject, I must speak of another fair virtue and feature which comes of cuckoldry, told to me by a fair and honest lady of good family, into whose closet I one day entered to find her on the point of finishing the writing of a tale with her own hand, which she readily shewed to me, for I was one of her close friends, from whom she hid nothing; she was very witty and fair of speech, and right apt for the making of love. In this wise did the tale begin:

It seems (said she) that among other fair characteristics of cuckoldry, it is the surest touchstone whereby one may know how pleasantly the wit may exercise itself to encompass the delight and content of human nature, for this it is which watches and contrives and fashions the artifice it must provide, without which nature furnishes but the desire & sensual appetite. And thus one may conceal by the ruse and cunning engendered of love, who it is who bears the horns. For one must needs deceive a

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jealous husband, full of anger and suspicion; one must blind and baffle the eyes of those who are readiest to think evil, and divert the curious from knowledge of the truth. One must inspire belief in fidelity where there is naught but deception, in frankness where all is dissimulation, in timidity where there is most licence. In a word, among such difficulties this is not to be accomplished by natural aptitudes alone; the wit must be unleashed, which gives delight and furnishes more horns than ever the body which plants them.

Such were the very words, without change or alteration, which this fair lady placed at the opening of the tale she wrote, but she manifested her theme otherwise; and so, following the loves of the lord and lady of her story, and to bring them to a perfect close, she declares that the beginning of love presents but an illusion of contentment. It is without form until it arrives at entire satisfaction and possession, and often enough one may believe this to be come, when indeed it is far away; and all one's reward is wasted time and bitter regret. (We should well note and weigh these last words, for they hit the mark, & are worthy of thought.) However, there is only the joy of love both for man and woman which forbids regret over time past. Whereto the honourable dame would give assignation to her lover in a wood, where she would often take her walks in a fine avenue, at the entrance to which she would leave her women, and go on to find him under a fine shady oak tree; for it was in the summer, 'And in this fastness,' to quote the lady's story, 'there can be no doubt of the sort of life which they led for a while, or of the fine altar which they erected to the poor husband in the Temple of Ceraton, although they were not in Delos,' (where the temple was all made of horns, founded we may guess by some fine fellow of old).

In this wise did the lady make a mock of her husband, as well in her writings as in her pleasures and her actions. And we may well take note of all her words, for they carry weight, as coming from so clever & honourable a lady.

The whole tale is so excellent that I would gladly have given it here;

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but it is too long, for the conference between the lady & her lover, before reaching its end is lengthy and finely writ, wherein she reproaches the gallant for his extravagant praise of her, saying that this came rather of fresh passion and new love in him than of merit in her (though indeed she was a fair and honourable dame) and to override this opinion, he must needs give great proofs of his love, which are finely specified in the tale: and afterwards being at one, we may see all the ruses, deceptions, and tricks to which they resort, both against the husband & against the world, which are most pleasantly and wittily conceived.

I prayed this lady to give me a copy of this tale, which she did very willingly, copying it herself for fear of discovery, and which I cherish as a most precious possession.

In truth this lady was right in ascribing this property and virtue to cuckoldom; for, until she turned herself to love, she had but little wit, but later, having tasted of it, she became one of the cleverest and most witty women in France, whether in this matter or in others. And verily, she is not the first whom I have seen become more apt by dalliance in love, for I have known an infinite number to be most foolish and stupid at their first beginning; but before they had lodged a full year at the school of Cupid and Venus his mother, they would return keen-witted and accomplished women in all things. And for myself, I have never yet seen a whore who was not most apt and ready to hold her own.

¶ Now I will put one question more: in what season of the year are the most cuckolds made, and which is the most fitting for love, and to captivate women, whether widow or maid? Assuredly by common consent this season is spring, which stirs the sluggish mind and body, dulled by the tedious melancholy winter: and since at this time all birds and beasts rejoice & yield themselves to love, should not mankind with their greater feeling and perception be sensible of it, and above all women (according to the opinion of many philosophers & physicians) who burn then with greater love and ardour than at any other season—and this I have heard declared by many fair and honest ladies, and more than all by a certain

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great lady who would never fail, when spring came round, to be more touched and pricked of love than at any other time, and would say that she felt the young grass springing, and hankered after it like mares and colts, and if she tasted of it not, she would pine and grow thin. In very truth she did so, and became thereafter more and more amorous. And of three or four new lovers which she took in the course of her life, each one have I seen her yield to in the spring, and this not without reason; for of all the months of the year, April and May are above all held sacred and dedicated to Venus, what time fair ladies begin with greater eagerness to pamper their fair bodies & adorn them finely, to dress lightly & arrange their hair in wanton fashion, so that one may well say that all these new fashions & modes tend every one to greater lubricity, which peoples the earth with cuckolds walking up and down, just as the wind and sky produce those winged ones of April and May.

Moreover, it is not to be thought that fair women, be they maids or widows, when they see everywhere in their walks, in their woods, in their forests, preserves, parks, meadows, gardens, shrubberies and pleasure-grounds, *the love-making and lascivious sport of birds and beasts*, should feel no strange pricking of the flesh, whence they will turn on a sudden to seek a remedy. And hence comes one of the caressing reflections often indulged in by lovers, who seeing each other without flame or desire, will point out to them birds & beasts, whether wild or domestic, such as sparrows & tame pigeons, which do naught but wanton, engender & conceive, down to the very trees and plants. And in this wise a fair Spanish dame spoke one day to a gallant who was over cold or respectful: *Ea, gentil caballero, mira como los amores de todas suertes se tratan y triunfan en este verano, y V.S. queda flaco y abatido*. Which is to say: See, gentle lover, how every sort of love flourishes and comes to its triumph in this season of spring; and you alone remain languid and cast down.

Spring at its close gives place to summer, which follows after with its heat; thus does one warmth provoke another, and this too in women, whereto they can find no ease so refreshing as an ardent bout of love. This

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is in no wise to cure contrary by contrary, but like by like, for though she may bathe herself daily & plunge in the clearest fountain of a whole countryside, this will serve nothing, nor the lightest habits which she may wear for coolness' sake, though she lift them up never so high, or leave off her drawers, or put her faithingale over them without first a petticoat, as many do. And herein is the worst, for in this state they will look at themselves, enraptured with gazing at their own charms in the fair sunlight, until finding themselves so beautiful, white, dimpled, plump and smooth, they will on a sudden feel the prick of temptation, and must at once to a man, or verily they will burn alive—though few enough of these one sees, for they are fools indeed. And so they lie reclined in their fine beds, unable to bear sheet or coverlet, but with their very shifts raised until they are half naked; & in the morning, as the light of the rising sun falls upon them, they come to regard their fair bodies ever more closely and in every part, whereupon they burn for their lovers, & long for their coming. Whence, should these arrive at such a moment, faith, they are indeed welcome, for they are clasped and embraced. For here (they will say) is the sweetest embrace & delight of any hour of the day. 'And this,' said a great lady to me one day, 'is because a woman's Fancy is more apt after the soft warmth and fires of the night, which (so to speak) cook and sweeten it, and thus it becomes more tender and luscious.'

None the less it is said in an ancient saw: June and July, Mouth wet and Fancy dry; and one might truly add, the month of August. This is, moreover, true of men, who are in great hazard when they overheat themselves at this season, & in chief when the dog-star is in the ascendant, of which they should of a surety beware: but if they must burn their own candle so much the worse for them. But these risks never threaten women in that all months, all signs, every time and season, are in their favour.

At this time the fair fruits of summer appear, which should refresh these good hot-blooded dames. I have seen many to eat little of these, others more. But none the less there is no change to be seen in the ardour of either the one or the other, for all their eating or their abstinence, and

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herein lies the trouble, that if certain fruits are refreshing, there are many others which are even more heating, to which these ladies have recourse the most often, as well as to certain simples which are in themselves excellent to eat in soups & salads, such as asparagus, artichokes, mushrooms, truffles, and pumpkins, and other singular viands which our cooks, under their instructions, know very well how to contrive to suit at once their greed & their lasciviousness, & which the physicians likewise are willing enough to order them. But were some learned gallant to reveal these mysteries, he might fare better than I.

And after all these dainty tit-bits, poor husbands and lovers beware! For if you are not forearmed you are like to be undone, & often enough you will be deserted for new delights.

Nor is this the whole of the matter, for to these new-fangled fruits of field & garden must be added fine rich pastry of late invention, garnished with pistachio nuts, kernels, and other rescaldatives of the apothecary, but more than all else cocks' combs and other parts, which are produced in the summer in greater abundance than in winter and the other seasons, whence follows great slaughter of the young birds and cockerels, which are hotter & more ardent than the older birds which are killed in winter. And truly this is one among others of the rare pleasures & delights which summer yields to lovers.

And by all I have heard, these pasties compounded of dainty tit-bits, of artichokes and truffles and other heating fare, are much used of certain ladies, who when they are eating and taking their fill with their fingers or their forks, fishing up and devouring now an artichoke, a truffle or a pistachio nut, now a cock's comb or other tasty morsel, they will cry out with an air of melancholy and disappointment, 'Bah, a blank!' But when they meet one of these other dainties and put it in their mouths, they will exclaim joyfully, 'Marry, a prize!' Just as at the lottery in Italy, and as though they had entered in and drawn some rare and precious jewel.

Truly they are much beholden to these little cockerels which summer brings, and early autumn too, which season I range with summer, and

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which produces many another fruit, together with the small fowl which are a hundred times more pungent than those of winter-tide and the late autumn which verges thereon, for autumn though it be, in this season we can no longer gather all those fine simples in their prime, nor aught else as in the warmer season. Yet winter will bring forward what it may, such as those excellent thistles which so well engender heat & concupiscence, whether raw or cooked, down to the little field thistles on which the asses live and flourish and make love, which summer renders hard, but winter will produce them tender and delicate, whereof folk make passing fine salads of a new sort.

And more than this, our apothecaries, drug-vendors & perfumers have discovered so many potent drugs that naught can be forgotten, whether for pasties or soups. Nor is there aught to be said against this conserving of women's natural heat in winter, as well as they can, for (they say) since we are so prudent in keeping up the warmth of the outside of our bodies, why should we not do likewise for the inside? To which men may reply: Nay, but what serves it so to add heat to heat, like silk on silk, contrary to the Canons, since of themselves they burn enough already, and are of their own nature ardent at whatever hour we may solicit them, without resort to artifice? What would you? It may be they fear that their hot and fiery blood will lose its heat and ebb in their veins, becoming chill and icy, if they be not entreated, like that of a hermit who lives on roots alone.

But let them have their will, whence their fine gallants will rejoice, for if they burn so constantly then will they be taken at the first assault, and their poor husbands be cuckolded and horned like satyrs. Moreover, these worthy ladies will oftentimes do even better, for out of kindness they will share their fine pasties, soups and broths with their lovers, so that these shall be ever more hardy and unflinching when they come to the encounter, wherein they shall bear themselves better and receive greater delight. Some indeed will give their lovers the recipe for these dishes to be made privately in their own kitchens, wherein they are like

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to be much deceived, as I have heard tell of a gallant gentleman who, thus put in trim by his special soup and coming in high feather to solicit his mistress, threatened her with the dance he would lead her, having taken his soup and his pasty. To which she replied: As to that, you shall prove yourself, and we shall see. But once they were embraced and closed this good cheer served him but for two poor bouts alone. Whereupon she declared either that the cook had contrived it ill or been sparing of the drugs and confections needed, or that he had neglected some preparations for this sovereign medicine, or that his body was at that time ill disposed for its taking and action: and so she mocked him.

However that may be, all drugs, foods, simples and medicines are not proper for all alike; with some they will operate, with others not. Where-to I have known women who would take of these heating dishes, it being expounded to them how by this means they would have greater & extraordinary pleasure with husband or lover, or in some nocturnal pollution; yet they would swear and avow that such fare caused them no temptation of whatever sort. But God knows, it may have been all their cunning.

Now those ladies who enter the lists to advocate the winter season maintain that for soups and heating dishes they know enough recipes to make these as good in winter as in other seasons. They have had experience in plenty, and for the making of love do vow this season to be most proper. For just as winter is dark, obscure, quiet, secret and retired, so likewise is love, which must be made in secret, in dim withdrawn places, whether in a private closet or in some chimney corner beside a good fire which provokes (do we but stay close and long enough) every whit as much venereal ardour as the summer.

And how good it is in some obscure corridor (where the eyes of others, provided they be gathered round the fire for warmth, with difficulty penetrate) or else seated on chests or beds apart, to make love, where seeing two pressed close together folk think it is by reason of the cold and to keep each other warm. Nevertheless fine things are done when the lights are withdrawn to a distant table or sideboard.

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Moreover, once a-bed, which season is best? 'Tis all the pleasure in life for lovers to embrace and join together, to caress and to entwine one with the other for fear of cold, not for a short while but for long, and sweetly to enflame each other, feeling naught of the inordinate heat of the summer, nor of that excess of sweating which so incommodes the motions of love: for then, in place of close clinging and clasping and enfolding, lovers must perforce hold slackly and draw apart. Moreover winter is best (say these dames) in the judgment of physicians, when men are more apt, ardent & eager for love than in summer.

I knew of old a very great Princess, of witty mind, excelling both in speech and writing. She set herself one day to compose some verses in praise of winter and its fitness for love making. (Whereto one may well guess how meet and fitting she herself had found it.) They were adroitly turned, and I treasured them a long while in my cabinet: I would give much to discover them now and give them here, so that all might read therein of the great virtues of winter and its expediency for love.

I once knew a very great lady, as beautiful as any in the world, who being newly widowed would make pretence that she wished not, for her mourning and sad estate, to go after supper either to the Court, nor to balls, nor the Queen's *couchée*, and in order not to seem worldly would not leave her chamber, though she suffered all her attendants to betake themselves to the dance, and would even send them thither, even her own son, while she withdrew to her chamber. And thence would come her lover, whom she had long held dear and loved and favoured during her married life; or perhaps, having supped with her, he would not leave her, bidding good-night to a certain brother-in-law who was fain to play the watchdog over this fair lady. Whereupon they would indulge and renew their former loves, and practise new ones for a second marriage, which came about the following summer. Since then I have considered all their circumstances, & of a truth I believe that no other season would have been so meet for their loves as winter, as indeed I have heard one of her waiting-maids declare.

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And now to make an end I do maintain and swear, that all seasons are proper for love, so they be taken at the right time and according to the caprice of men & women who choose them: for just as Mars will take all times & all seasons in which to make war, & will grant the victory to who-soever pleases him, or according as he finds his warriors well equipped and courageous in the fight, so likewise does Venus, according as she finds her assemblies of lovers well disposed for the onset. To these the seasons make but small odds, and their choice and preference matters little; nor do all their drugs and artifices serve either to augment or to abate their heat. Whereto I once knew a great lady whose mother from her infancy, seeing her of such fiery & ardent temper as would set her one day straight on the road to the brothel, caused her for full thirty years to take sorrel-juice with all her meals, either with her meat or in her soups and broths, or to drink great two-handled porringers of it alone: in a word, all her sauce was sorrel-juice. But all these cooling draughts served nothing in the end, for she became a great & famous whore who had no need of these pasties of which I have spoken to give her ardour, for she had enough of her own. But even now she is as greedy as another to eat of them.

¶ Now I must needs come to a close, though I might well have said more and cited many another reason and example: but one should not gnaw for ever at the same bone, and I am right willing to bequeath my pen to another & worthier writer than I, who would better follow out the merits of the various seasons: which brings to my mind the longing and desire once expressed by an honourable lady of Spain, who would have it to be winter when she loved, & her lover a fire, so that when she came to warm herself at him by reason of the great cold which she felt, he should have the pleasure of warming her, and she of absorbing his heat as she grew hot, and so by little and little to expose herself thoroughly to his gaze, the while she would warm herself at her ease, with clothes turned back and legs stretched wide, so he might share the sight of her fair limbs once hid under her linen and her skirts, and as much to warm herself ever the better, and to keep up the raging wanton fire that burned within her.

THE SECOND DISCOURSE

*Concerning Sight, Touch & Speech, & which of these
brings most delight to Lovers*

Introduction

THIS IS A QUESTION CONCERNING LOVE, TO solve the which might well deserve a writer of greater wisdom and resouce than I, to wit: among the joys of love, which pleases most, whether touching or contact, or speech, or sight? M. Pasquier, truly a man of great authority in jurisprudence, it being his own profession, as well as in other matters of science and the humanities, has discoursed upon the same in one of his letters (which he has left to us in writing), yet alas too briefly, nor should so illustrious a man have been so sparing of his wise words, for had he been a little more diffuse and stated with greater candour what he could so well have told, this letter he wrote thereon would have been a hundred times more agreeable and entertaining.

His main discourse is based upon an old rhyme by the Comte Thibaud de Champagne, which I have never seen, save only the little fragment quoted by M. Pasquier. And to my mind this brave and gallant knight of old time puts the thing very fairly; not, may be, in such fine phrases as our gallant poets of to-day, but yet with sound sense and good reason. Moreover he is furnished with a rare and worthy subject, namely Queen Blanche of Castille, mother of Saint Louis, to whom he lost his heart, indeed most desperately, and had taken her for his mistress. Wherein is there reproach or censure for the fair Queen? For had she been the most politic and prudent of women, how could she hinder the world from burning with love at the fires of her beauty and her virtues, since 'tis the property of virtue and of all perfection to endear itself to others? But not to surrender to the will of the lover is the whole matter.

Wherefore should we find naught strange or blameworthy if this Queen was so much loved, in that during her reign and sovereignty the whole of France was torn with feud and sedition and civil war; for as I have heard said by a very great personage, discord will arise as often for love as for intrigues of State, & in our fathers' time there was an old saying which ran: Of the blithe Queen's figure all the world was fain.

I know not for which Queen the saw was made; it may have been by

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this same Count Thibaud, who, perhaps in that he was not favoured of her whom he desired, or even disdained, or another loved better than he, nursed in his heart the wrath which led him to his ruin in this time of war and tumult. So comes it many a time when a great Queen of rare beauty, or a Princess or noble lady sets out to govern a State, that such a one desires to serve her with all honour & respect, inasmuch as he might stand high in her favour and good graces, and to the end that he might boast of reigning and governing the State with her to his own profit. Whereto I could cite many an example, but this I will forego.

However that may be, this Count Thibaud was finely inspired to the writing of verse by the fair subject I have named, and maybe to put this question which M. Pasquier presents to us, to which I would refer the curious reader, without touching here on other rhymes, for 'twould be waste of labour. Let it now suffice to speak of it as seems best to me, whether of my own opinion or that of wiser lovers than I.

NOW AS TO TOUCH, IT MUST BE ALLOWED THAT couching is assuredly delectable, inasmuch as the perfection of love is lovers' play, and such play cannot be without touching; for even as hunger and thirst can by no means be appeased and satisfied except by eating and drinking, so also can love be slaked neither by speech nor sight, but by touching, embracing, and the usages of Venus. Whereeto that whimsical coxcomb, Diogenes the Cynic, hazarded with lewd and waggish humour that he wished he could appease his hunger by rubbing his belly, even as by rubbing his verge he could accommodate his desire. I might well have put this in plainer words, but one must needs pass over such things lightly. He resembled in this that lover of Lamia, who, having paid an extortionate price for enjoying her, neither could nor would forego this delight. Wherefore he contrived by thinking of her to corrupt or pollute himself, and so appeased his desire in imagination; which when she heard, she had him haled before the judge, that she might receive payment and remuneration for his pleasures. Whereupon the judge ordered that by the sound and jingling of the money which he should shew to her she would receive payment, & would so gratify her desire in thought and fancy, even as he gratified his.

It is true enough that folk may allege against this many another fashion of love, whereof the ancient philosophers were reticent, but in this matter I would defer to the judgment of these, and to those subtle spirits who would discourse thereon. For inasmuch as the fruit of earthly love is pleasure and naught else, this can in no wise come save by touching and embracing. In like manner many have held that this pleasure was slight enough, without sight and speech; whereof we have a fair example in the *Cent Nouvelles* of the Queen of Navarre. An honourable gentleman, having on several occasions taken his pleasure with a certain honest lady, by night and disguised with a hand-mask (for dominoes were not then in use), in some dark and obscure corridor, though he well knew by touch that here was nothing that was not fair, dainty and exquisite, yet could not content himself with this favour alone, but desired to know with

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whom he had to do; wherefore, while kissing and enfolding her one day, he marked with chalk the back of her gown, which was of black velvet; and after supper that evening (for their assignations were at certain fixed hours) as the ladies were entering the ballroom, he concealed himself behind the door, & noting them carefully as they passed, he saw his own fair lady marked on the shoulder, and of a truth she was one of whom he had never dreamed, for in her bearing, her countenance and her words, one would have taken her for the Wisdom of Solomon itself, and so the Queen would oft describe her.

Who was astonished? Who but the gentleman, who by a fair chance had taken his joy of the one lady of all the Court he had deemed least like to yield. 'Tis very true that he desired to adventure further, and not stop at this point; for he would fain discover all, and know from her why she would thus conceal herself from him, taking pleasure thus privily and by stealth. But the cunning dame denied and denied again the whole affair, even though she should lose her share of Paradise & gain her soul's damnation, after the fashion of ladies when they are taxed with love-fancies they wish unknown, even though it be an ascertained fact, and they in other respects most truthful.

She was so angered at this that in consequence the gentleman lost his good fortune. For good it was in very truth, since she was a great lady and worth the winning. And what is more, when she was set on playing the sweet chaste prude, and feigning thus, in this he should have found double pleasure; the one in so dainty and delicious a sweet, the other in watching her often in public, with her coy, cold and modest airs, and her chaste, strict, austere conversation, while himself recalled her wanton movements, her seductive and lascivious ways, when they were together.

Herein was the gentleman much to blame in questioning her; for he should rather have continued to enjoy her & savour his dainty in silence, as well without a candle as under all the lights of her chamber. None the less he might well have desired to know who she was, nor was his curiosity blameworthy, since (as the tale goes) he was in fear of having ado with

some sort of devil; for such devils are eager enough to transform themselves, and take on women's shape in order to have intercourse with men, and in like wise they will deceive them; among whom, as I have heard said by those skilled in the subtleties of magic, it is easier to disguise themselves according to the form and face of a woman, but not as to speech.

And for this reason the gentleman was right in his desire to see and to know her; and, by his own account, the refraining from speech caused him greater apprehension than his not seeing her, & set him a-thinking of the Devil; wherein he shewed that he feared God.

But having discovered all, he ought to have said not another word. But how so? someone will reply, for friendship and love are never so perfect as when protested of heart and mouth; and for this reason the gentleman would fain have confessed his passion, but as it fell out he gained nothing, but lost all. And as for those who may plumb the true humour of his mind, he will be readily excused, for he was neither so cold nor so discreet that he would of his own nature play such a game, & with such caution; and by what I have heard from my mother, who was at the Court of the Queen of Navarre, and who knew many of the secrets concerning the *Hundred Tales*, since she devised a part of it, the gentleman was none other than my late uncle, M. de la Chastaigneraye, whose nature was blunt, hasty, and a little inconstant.

The tale is so devised, however, as best to hide this; for my uncle was never in the service of the great Princess, the lady's mistress, but in that of the King her brother, wherein he continued, for he was dearly loved of both the King and the Princess. The lady I will not name, but she was a widow, and lady in waiting to a very great Princess, who was better at playing the prude than any lady of the Court.

¶ I have heard tell of a lady at the Court of our late Kings, whom I knew, who being enamoured of a very honourable gentleman of the Court, was desirous of following the fashion of love pursued by this other lady, and so often as she would go to her assignation & rendezvous, she would return to her chamber, and be examined all over by one of her maids or

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chamber-women, lest she should be marked; and by this means guarded herself against recognition & discovery. Nor was she ever marked until the ninth meeting, when the mark was at once discovered by her women. Wherefore, fearing scandal and disgrace, she broke it all off, and returned no more to the trysting-place.

A better way, some may suggest, would have been to allow herself to be marked on every occasion, and afterwards to have effaced and rubbed them out, whence would have come double pleasure, the one of amorous pleasure, the other of making game of her lover, who laboured so hard to discover and reveal the philosopher's stone, and could in no wise succeed. ¶ I have heard tell of another in the time of King Francis, concerned with the handsome squire Gruffy, who was squire of the stables of the King, and died at *Naples* in the service of M. de Lautrec, and a very great lady of the Court, who became madly in love with him; for he was of a truth very good-looking, and was commonly called the handsome Gruffy, whose portrait I have seen, and which shews him to be so.

She summoned to her room one day her chamber-valet, whom she trusted, who was unknown & unseen of most, & sent him, well dressed as though one of her gentlemen, to tell Gruffy that a fair and honest lady greeted him, and that she was so enamoured of him as to desire his acquaintance more than that of any other man at Court, but in such wise that she would not for all the world that he should see and know her, but at the hour of retiring, when all the Court should have gone to bed, he would come for him to a certain place which he would shew him, whence he would lead him to lie with this lady, but with this provision also, that he would allow his eyes to be covered with a fine white handkerchief, like a trumpeter led into a hostile city, so that he should neither see nor recognise the place nor the chamber whither he was led, & that he should hold him by the hands all the while, lest he should undo the handkerchief; for such were the commands of his mistress in proposing the conditions, that she might not be known of him until a certain fixed time which he appointed to him. Where to, let him think it over & consider

whether he would come to her on such conditions before the messenger should come on the morrow to know his decision; for he would come to conduct him from a certain place which he named, & above all he must be alone. Moreover (he said) he would lead him into so fine a place that he should never repent him of visiting it.

Truly a happy assignation, and arranged under strange conditions. I like as well that of a Spanish lady, who summoning a certain one to a tryst, required that he should bring with him three SSS, meaning to say, *sabio, solo, segreto*, solicitude, solitude, and secrecy. The other vowed that he would come, should she be furnished and provided with three FFF, which were that she should be neither *fea, flaca*, nor *fria*; foul of feature, nor faint of desire, nor frozen of heart.

But to return to the story of Gruffy. The messenger now left him, embarrassed & thoughtful, for he had much food for thought, inasmuch as it might well be a trap laid by some enemy at Court to bring him into disfavour with the King, or perhaps to cause his death. Not less did he muse upon what lady it might be, whether tall, or of middle height, or small, whether fair or ill-favoured, which most vexed his mind, though indeed, as folks say, all cats are grey at night, and all persons alike in the dark. Wherefore, after having debated it with one of his most intimate friends, he resolved to take the risk, since for love of a great lady, as he took her to be, 'twas not fitting for him to be full of fears and apprehension. Thus on the morrow, when the King, the Queen and ladies of the Court, and all others were retired for the night, he did not fail to keep the appointment with the messenger, who likewise came in all good time to find him, accompanied by another, to aid him in keeping guard should the gallant gentleman be followed by either page, or lackey, or gentleman. On seeing him he said only: Come, sir, the lady awaits you. Then on the instant he bound his eyes, & led him by dark narrow corridors & unknown ways in such wise that the other told him frankly that he knew not where he was being led, & presently they entered the lady's chamber, which was so dark and dim that one could see no more than in an oven.

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And so he found his lady, perfumed and sweetly scented, which gave him hopes of some rare delight, whereupon he was made to disrobe at once by the messenger, who himself helped him; & after led him by the hand, having removed the handkerchief, to the lady's bed, who awaited him with fond desire. Thus he laid himself down beside her, and fell to embracing and caressing her body, wherein he found all fair and delectable, from her skin to her linen and fine bed, which he savoured with his hands; and so passed his night joyously with this beautiful dame, whom I have heard of by name. In a word, everything delighted him in every fashion, and he was well aware how fine a harbour he had found for the night, and all his trouble (he said) was that he could draw from her no single word all night through. She took good heed of that, for by day he had often spoken with her, as with other ladies, & by this he would have known her at once. Yet of fondling and wanton play, of touching and caressing, and of every fashion and manner of lasciviousness and love she made no stint, wherein he found much after his own fancy.

The next morning at daybreak the messenger failed not to come and wake him, made him rise and dress, bound his eyes and led him once more to that place whence he had come, commending him to God until his next coming thither, which he vowed should be soon. Nor did he fail to demand of him whether he had lied in aught, and whether he had not found it well to have believed him, and whether he had not helped him to a fair piece of fortune and a good lodging.

The handsome Gruffy, after having thanked him a hundred times, bade him adieu, saying that he should always be ready to return to such good fare, and would hasten back whenever he could; which he did, and these joys did last a full month, at the end of which space Gruffy was obliged to depart on his voyage to *Naples*, and bade farewell to his lady, taking leave of her with all regret, yet without drawing one word from her lips, but only sighs, and the tears which he felt to flow from her eyes. So it fell out that he left her without in the least discovering who she was.

Since that time it has been said that the lady pursued this life with two

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or three others in the same fashion, so taking her pleasure. Moreover it was rumoured that she practised this device by reason of her own meanness, whereby she spared her substance and was not obliged to make gifts to her lovers; for after all, every great lady is in honour bound to give, whether little or much, whether money or rings or jewels, or gifts of great price. By this means the gallant dame procured pleasure to her person yet spared her purse, simply by not revealing who she was, whereby she could incur no blame in the matter, since none knew her. Truly a grievous humour in a great lady.

Some will praise this fashion, others censure; others again will hold her a shrewd dame, others a frugal housewife; for myself I will defer to those wiser in such matters than I; for at least she could not incur such blame as that Queen who lived in the Hôtel de Nesle in *Paris*, keeping a watch on those who passed by, and such as pleased her most, whatever sort of folk they might be, she would summon to come in to her, when, having had what she would of them, she had them thrown from the top of the tower (which is still to be seen) down into the water, where they would drown.'

I cannot say whether this be true; but common people, or at least most of them in *Paris*, avow it to be; and so well-known is it that should one but point to the tower and make question of it they will immediately fall to narrating the tale.

But let us leave these loves, which have more of monstrosity about them than true love, and which are abhorred of many ladies of these days, for verily they are right in desiring open love-making with their gallants, and not as though they were made of stone or marble; wherein, having well chosen their lovers, they know well how to make themselves beloved and served of them. And having proved their fidelity & loyalty then will they abandon themselves in ardent love, & take their pleasure with them, not in masks and in silence, nor mute, by night and in secret; but in the clear open light of day they will have their lovers to see and touch, to taste and caress, and entreat them with sweet and wanton words, with

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provocative and lascivious talk. Sometimes it may be they will resort to masks, for many ladies there be who are obliged to make use of them while a-doing, whether for fear of sunburn, of spoiling their complexion, or what not, so that if they get too heated, or are discovered, none will know of their blushes, nor the confusion of their countenance—the which I have many a time seen—and thus they cozen the world.

I HAVE HEARD TELL OF MANY DAMES & GALLANTS expert in love, who assert that without sight and speech, they would as soon be like brute beasts, who following their natural sensual appetite, have no other care or inclination but to assuage their rage and heat.

Likewise I have heard it said by many great knights and gallant gentlemen who have lain with great ladies, that they have found them a hundred times more dissolute and lewd in speech than common women and such. Wherein they use much art, inasmuch as it is impossible for a man, however vigorous, forever to drudge and labour; but when he comes to repose and relaxation, it will please him and prick his desire when his lady diverts him with wanton tales and lewd and merry words, so much that, though Venus sleep the soundest sleep in the world she will abruptly awake. Even as some ladies, discoursing with their lovers in public, whether in the chambers of Queens and Princesses and the like, will of a truth bewitch them with their dainty seductive talk, till they are as wrought-up as if a-bed together; while we who look on imagine their conversation to be quite other.

¶ For this reason Mark Antony so loved Cleopatra, preferring her before his own wife Octavia, who was a hundred times fairer and more lovable than Cleopatra; but she was a past mistress of graceful phrases & elegant conversation, with her wanton alluring ways, that Antony forgot all else in his love of her.

Plutarch avows (in writing of certain jests and tricks of speech which came so happily from her) that Mark Antony when he desired to imitate her, was like nothing so much (however ardently he might wish to play the gallant) as a common soldier or beggarly man-at-arms, by contrast with her and her fine phrases.

Pliny tells a tale of her which I find very fine, and for this reason I will give the same in brief. One day, when she was in one of her merriest humours, and being arrayed gaily and to great advantage, her head garlanded with divers flowers most provocative of lechery, when they were at table, and Mark Antony about to drink, she entertained him with

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sweet discourse, and while she spoke, she would pluck off the fair buds of her garland, and throw them one by one into the drinking-cup which he was holding. Then having finished her talk, just as he was about to put the cup to his lips and drink, Cleopatra stayed him on a sudden with her hand, and having placed some slave or criminal near by, she beckoned him, and gave him to drink the draught which Mark Antony was about to toss off, whereat he fell down dead at once, & she, turning to her lover, said. Had I not loved you as I do, I should but now be quit of you, and willingly indeed would I do it, did I not know well that my life would be nothing worth without you. This shift and these words were apt indeed to confirm Mark Antony in his passion, so that he might ever the more idle his time away at his charmer's feet.

In this wise did her skilled tongue avail Cleopatra, whom every tale describes as passing ready of speech; nor did he call her aught else but simply the Queen, to do her greater honour, as he wrote to Octavius Cæsar, before they became avowed enemies. Why (he wrote) have you changed, touching my love of the Queen? She is my wife. Have I but this hour begun to love her? You make love to Drusilla, Tortale, Leontiphe, Ruphile, or Salura Litiseme, and others; what do you care where you love, when the caprice takes you?

In this letter Mark Antony upheld his own constancy and cast blame on the fickleness of the other, who loved so many women at once, while he loved his Queen alone. Whereto I wonder that Octavius did not love her also, after the death of Antony. It may well be that he had joy of her, when he saw her and had her to come alone to his chamber, where she harangued him: it is possible too that he did not find her such as he had thought, or held her lightly for some other reason, and desired to exhibit her publicly in his procession when he celebrated his triumph in Rome; but this she circumvented by taking her life.

Certain it is, to return to our first point, that when a woman longs after love, or is once well embroiled therein, there is no orator in the world of wittier speech than she. We may recall how Sophonisba was described

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to us by Livy, Appian and others, and how ready of tongue in Massinissa's case, when she came to him, to gain his love and his devotion; and later when it came to swallowing the poison. In a word, every woman to be dearly loved must be fair-spoken, and certes there be few indeed who have not the gift of words enough to move heaven & earth, though this were frost-bound in the middle of winter.

And this is most true of those who devote themselves to love, for if they have naught to say, then are they so insipid that the gift which they offer has neither taste nor savour; thus when M. du Bellay, speaking of his mistress and her ways, declared:

Of virtue I knew well how to discourse,
And fairly hold my talk in such a course
That naught but honour from my lips be sped;
Modest in speech, and wanton once a-bed.²

but describing her as modest in speech and wanton a-bed, he but spoke of discourse in public and general conversation. For when she is once alone with her lover, every gallant dame is willing enough to be free-spoken & to say what she pleases, so much the better to excite his desire.

I have heard many a tale told of those who have been favoured of fair ladies of high birth, or who have been curious to overhear them in talk a-bed with others, wherein they were said to be no less free and wanton in their speech than any courtesan of their acquaintance; but one may indeed wonder that since these ladies were so well accustomed to entertain their husbands or their lovers with wanton words and phrases, and lewd & dissolute talk, even to naming freely their most secret parts without any glossing over, yet when they are conversing in company with others they never once forget themselves nor let slip even one of these loose words. It must therefore be conceded that they are well skilled in the arts of self-command & dissimulation, since there is naught for prancing and curvetting like the tongue of a fine lady or a whore.

Another lady whom I knew, talking with a certain lady of higher rank

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than herself, while praising and commending her beauty, did add to her eulogy: 'Nay, Madam, this that I tell you is not mere adultery,' meaning to say adulation, as she corrected herself at once: but her mind was running on adulterers and adultery.

In short, wanton speech has great efficacy in the game of love, and where it is not the pleasure is not complete: thus in very truth, if a beautiful body have not a fair mind it is more like to be an idol than a human body, and if it wishes to endear itself, however beautiful it may be, it must needs be seconded by a fair mind, which if it have not by nature it must fashion by art.

The courtesans of *Rome* do look with a scornful eye upon the gentle ladies of the city who have not their art of witty speech, and say of them that they yield like bitches, and are as dumb of mouth as a stone.

And for this reason I have known many an honest gentleman to refuse the acquaintance of certain ladies, fair though they were, because they were ninnies, without mind or wit or conversation, or who have deserted them for good, saying that they would sooner have ado with some beautiful statue of fair white marble, like one who in *Athens* loved after this manner & took his pleasure so. Wherefore strangers travelling in foreign lands care little for the love of foreign women, nor would they willingly be enamoured of them, for since they understand no word of their speech it will in no wise touch their heart. I mean of course those who have no understanding of their language. But when they have to do with them it is no more than to satisfy nature and to quench their animal heat, and then back to the ship, as was said one day by an Italian who had disembarked at *Marseilles* on his way to Spain, and asked where he should find women. He was directed to a place where a wedding feast was being held, but when a lady came to accost him and discourse with him, he replied: Pardon me, Madam, I desire not to talk, but only to do, and then back to the ship.

A Frenchman finds but little pleasure with a German, a Swiss, a Flemish, English, Scotch, Slavonic or other foreign dame, though her talk be

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the most entertaining in the world, if he understand it not: but he has every delight of his French mistress, or of an Italian or Spanish lady, for most Frenchmen of our day, or at least those who have travelled a little, commonly speak or understand these languages. And God knows, if he be apt and skilled in love, it matters not whether the lady in question be French, Italian, Spanish or Greek, so she be ready of speech, and he will frankly avow that he is ensnared and conquered.

Of old time our French tongue was not so fair & rich as it is nowadays, but the Italian, Spanish and Greek tongues have been thus since long ago: & of a truth I have but rarely seen a dame of these countries, has she but practised for ever so little the ways of love, who is not apt enough of speech, whereto those who have had dealings with them must bear witness. For certain it is that a fair lady endowed with fair speech has a double joy to bestow.

TO SPEAK NOW OF THE PLEASURES OF SIGHT. CERTAINLY, since it is the eyes which make the first onslaught in the combat of love, it may well be avowed that a great contentment comes of gazing on that which is fair and rare in beauty. And marry, what sight in the whole world is fairer than a beautiful woman, whether robed in fine attire or naked between the sheets? If clothed, you may see only the face naked; but none the less, when a beautiful body, of fair and elegant shape, of graceful carriage and magnificent port, presents itself fully to our eyes, what finer and more enchanting sight can the world display? And further, when you come to toy with one so attired and superbly clothed, ardour & joy are doubled, even though the face be all that is not covered: for one may but rarely have delight of a great lady in the surroundings most to be desired, if it be not in a chamber far withdrawn or a hidden place, or in a bed at ease, since such are followed wherever they go.

¶ Wherefore a certain great lady, of whom I have heard tell, meeting her gallant opportunely, out of sight and fearing no discovery, would at one seize the occasion to assuage her desire as promptly and swiftly as might be, saying to him one day: 'They were fools in the old days who through over-delicacy in their loves and pleasures would shut themselves apart, either in their closets or other hidden places, and there would so protract their sports and toyings that anon they would be discovered and shamed. In these days we must waste no time, nor make the least delay; but the sooner assaulted the sooner we shall be taken & captured. Whence shall no scandal come.'

And I take it the lady was right, for those wise in the ways of love declare there is naught like a bout when fully clothed. Moreover, when one considers how a lover will press and crush to him his lady in her fair array, setting in disorder and confusion the fair cloth of gold or silver, the tinsel & silken stuffs, all worked with pearls & precious stones, assuredly the delight to him must be by so much the greater, and far excelling that with some simple shepherdess or rustic, however fair.

And wherefore was Venus of old found so beautiful and so desirable,

if not that her fairness was ever set off with fair attire and delicious perfumes, so that the air was scented for a hundred paces away? For it has ever been held that sweet perfumes are a provocation to love.

And for this reason the Empresses and great ladies of *Rome* made much use of them, as do likewise our great ladies of *France*, and above all those of *Spain* and *Italy*, who in all times have been even more fastidious and exquisite in their tastes than the women of *France*, as much in sweet scents as in brave raiment and resplendent ornaments, whence our ladies have taken pattern and imitated their elegant devices. Moreover, these dames of *Italy* and *Spain* had taken the same from antique models and statues of Roman ladies, which one may still see among other ancient treasures in *Spain* and *Italy*, who having studied them long will find a rare perfection in their gowns and head-dresses which might well excite to love. But in these times our ladies of *France* surpass all; & in this they are much beholden to the Queen of *Navarre*.

Wherefore there is naught so meet and desirable as to have to do with fair ladies so well appointed, so richly attired and so superbly decked out, inasmuch as I have heard said by many of my companions, when we discoursed thereon together, that they would far sooner have them so than all uncovered and lying naked between a pair of sheets and in a bed, however richly embroidered. Others would allege that nothing could touch the natural state, without disguise or artifice: of like mind was a great Prince of my acquaintance, who would ever make his ladies or courtesans to lie between sheets of black satin,¹ all naked and stretched out, so that the whiteness and delicacy of their skins should appear fairer against the black and give the greater delight.

And of a truth there can be no doubt that there is no more fairer sight in the whole world than that of a fair woman complete and perfect in beauty; though this is rare enough. We likewise find it written that Zeuxis, the famous painter, having been desired of several honest dames and damsels of his acquaintance to paint a portrait of the beautiful Helen of Troy, & to represent her to them as being full as fair as folk had always

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said, was loth to refuse them: but before painting the portrait he would fixedly contemplate them all, and choosing from each one the feature he found most beautiful, he composed the picture of all these fair fragments brought together, and by this means depicted Helen so beautiful that no fault could be found, for the picture was admired of every one, but most of all of those whose separate beauties and parts had made it as much as Zeuxis with his brush. Which is to say that it was not possible to find in Helen every perfection of beauty, though she was surpassingly beautiful beyond all others.

However this may be, the Spaniard affirms that for a woman to be of absolute perfection and beauty she must possess thirty⁴ several beauties, which were once told to me by a Spanish lady in *Toledo*, where are many fair and seductive women who are well skilled in love. The thirty, then, are these:

*Tres cosas blancas: el cuero, los dientes, y las manos.
Tres negras: los ojos, las cejas, y las pestañas.
Tres coloradas: los labios, las mejillas, y las uñas.
Tres largos: el cuerpo, los cabellos, y las manos.
Tres cortas: los dientes, las orejas, y los pies.
Tres anchas: los pechos, la frente, y el entrecejo.
Tres estrechas: la boca, l'una y l'otra, la cinta, y l'entrada del pie.
Tres gruesas: el brazo, el musto, y la pantorrilla.
Tres delgadas: los dedos, los cabellos, y los labios.
Tres pequeñas: las tetas, la nariz, y la cabeza.*

Which translated, that they be the better understood, are:

Three things white: the skin, the teeth and the hands.
Three black: the eyes, the brows and the eyelashes.
Three red: the lips, the cheeks and the nails.
Three long: the body, the hair and the hands.
Three short: the teeth, the ears and the feet.

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Three wide: the chest or bosom, the forehead & the space between the brows.

Three narrow: the mouth (the one and the other), figure or waist, and the ankle.

Three stout: the arm, the thigh and the calf.

Three fine: the fingers, the hair and the lips.

Three small: the breasts, the nose and the head.

Being thirty in all,

It is not inconceivable and may well be that all these beauties should be assembled together in one woman: but she must needs be the model of perfection; for to see them all united, without one to criticise and cavil at, is hardly possible. But I would defer to those who have seen beautiful women, & who in contemplating & appraising them should pay heed to their words. But whether they attain to perfect and absolute beauty, still, a beautiful women will always be beautiful, if she have only the half and the principal points which I have just given: certes I have seen many who had more than half, and who were fair and desirable enough. In like wise a wood is always found beautiful in spring, though it have none of the little copses one would desire, but fine, great spreading trees which hide the lack of the smaller bushes.

M. de Ronsard must pardon me if he will: for never did his mistress, whom he has painted as so exceeding fair, encompass such beauty, nor any other dame he wrote of and knew in his time, be it even his fair Cassandra (who I well know was fair, though he has disguised her under a false name); or his Marie, who never bore another name than this: but it is permitted to poets and painters to say and do all their pleasure, as you may find in *Orlando Furioso* the marvellous beauties described of Ariosto, those of Alcina and many another.

All this may be, but I have it from a very great personage that no woman was ever so perfect by nature as she might appear in the lively & subtle images of some fine writer or poet, or as portrayed by the pencil

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and brush of some inspired painter. Enough! the eyes of men are ever content to see a beautiful woman, fair, white & shapely: or be she brown it is all one; 'tis as good as the white often enough. So quoth the Spanish girl: *Aunque io sia morisca, no soy de menos preciar* (though I am brown I am not to be scorned). Moreover the fair Marfisa was something dark-complexioned. Yet must not the brown efface the white entirely! Then indeed, a fair face must have a body fashioned and made to correspond, which is equally true of height and littleness, though tall stature surpasses all.

Now in considering these fine points of beauty of which I speak, and which writers have portrayed, we may well pass on, to take joy in the common beauties of our day. Nor would I slight them in saying common, since some be so rare that, by my faith, they are worth more than all those which your fantastic poets, your freakish painters and Pindarisers of female beauty might ever depict.

But alas, the worst of it is that when we see and admire these fair beauties with their lovely faces, we must straightway desire their sweet bodies for the love of those faces, but none the less, when these are discovered and laid bare, away goes our appetite; for they are so disfigured, ugly, blotched, scarred and hideous, as to give the lie to the fair face. Wherein we may often work our own deception.

¶ Of this we have a good example in a certain gentleman of the Isle of Marjorica, named Raimond Lully, of a rich, noble and ancient house, who by reason of his high rank, his valour and his virtues, was called in the heyday of his years to the government of this island. While in office, as may often happen to Governors of cities and provinces, he became enamoured of a fair lady of the island, who was exceedingly accomplished, beautiful and fair-spoken.

He wooed her ardently & long, and since he was for ever pressing her to bestow all her favour on him, she, after having refused him as long as might be, gave him one day an assignation, wherein he did not fail, nor did she, appearing fairer than ever and more finely arrayed. But just as

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he dreamed himself about to enter Paradise, she came forward baring her breast & bosom, which was all covered over with a dozen plasters, which tearing off one after the other, & casting them to the ground, she pointed to a hideous cancer, and with tears in her eyes recited to him all her woes and evil fortune, demanding of him whether there was so much in her of which to be enamoured, and on this told him so piteous a tale that he, all overcome with pity for the miseries of so fair a lady, straightway left her; and having commended her to God in her affliction, he gave up his office and became a hermit.

Later on, having returned from the Crusades, to which he had vowed himself, he went to *Paris*, to study under Arnaldus de Villanova, a great scholar and a philosopher, and on concluding his course there, he retired to England, where the reigning King received him with the warmest of welcomes, on the score of his great learning and his skill in transmuting certain ingots and bars of copper and tin, despising the trivial and general fashion of transmuting lead & iron into gold, since he knew that many of his time could perform this task as well as he, who could do both. But he wished to prove his superiority over the rest.

I have this tale from a certain gallant gentleman who himself had it from the jurisconsult Oldrade, who speaks of Raimond Lully in his commentary on the Code *De Falsa Moneta* (On False Coining). He again had it from Carolus Bovillus, a native of Picardy, who wrote in Latin a life of Lully.

In this wise he came to renounce his desire for the love of this fair lady. Others it may be would not have done so, and would have shut their eyes and not ceased to love, but would even have had their will of her, as he himself might well have done, since the part he aspired to was by no means touched with the same evil.

¶ I have known a gentleman and a lady, a widow, of the great world, who held no such scruples, for the lady being afflicted with a great foul cancer of the breast, yet he did not leave desiring to marry her, nor she to take him, though against her mother's advice. But ill and diseased as

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she was, yet would he and she so bestir themselves and gallop so hard all night long, that at last they broke open the sore and destroyed it to the roots.

¶ I knew likewise a most honourable gentleman and my intimate friend, who told me that once upon a time in *Rome*, he fell in love with a Spanish lady, one of the fairest that was ever in that city. But when he had ado with her, she would permit him neither to see nor to touch her naked thighs, but only with her drawers on, inasmuch as, when he would touch her, she would say to him in Spanish: *Ah! no me tocats, hareis me quos-quillas*; which is to say, Ah, touch me not; you tickle me. But one morning as he was passing by her house, finding the door open, he went boldly in, and meeting neither servant nor page nor anyone else, he entered her chamber, where he found her so deep in sleep that he had leisure to view her there all naked on the bed, and to contemplate her at ease, for it was hot. And (he vowed) he had never seen aught so fair as her body, save that he found one thigh to be fair, smooth and shapely, while the other was dried up, wizened & stunted, appearing no bigger than a baby's arm. Who was astonished? Who but the gentleman, who was consumed with pity for her—but never more returned to visit her, nor had he any further ado with her.

There may be seen many ladies who are not thus withered by disease; but they are so lean and gaunt, so scraggy and fleshless, that they are no more than skeletons. So did I know a great lady, of whom it was said in jest by the Bishop of Sisteron, a wittier man than many at Court, that he would sooner lie with an iron-wired rat-trap than with her: likewise quoth another gentleman of the Court, of whom we were making game for his doings with a certain great lady: 'Tis you are in error; for I love fair flesh, but she has naught but bones.' None the less, to see these ladies and judge of their fair faces, one would take them to be well-nourished and dainty morsels.

¶ A certain high-born Prince of the great world happened on a time to become enamoured of two fair ladies at once, a fate which may often

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overtake the great, who so love variety. The one was very fair, the other a brunette, but both were beautiful and desirable beyond most. Where to, on his coming one day, from visiting the brunette, the jealous fair one said to him: 'Aha, so you've been flying after a crow.' The Prince, somewhat irritated and angered at the word, answered her: 'And when I am with you, after what do I fly?' 'After a phoenix,' the lady replied. To which the ready-tongued Prince made answer, 'Say rather a bird of paradise, which has more feathers than flesh,' so taunting her with leanness, for in truth she was of too tender years to have become stout, this commonly coming on only in middle age, when ladies begin to put on flesh, and their limbs and other parts thicken.

A certain gentleman made an apt retort to a great Lord of my acquaintance, both of them being possessed of fair wives. This great Lord, finding that of the gentleman very fair and captivating, said to him one day: 'Sir, I would lie with your wife.' The gentleman, who was ready of speech, said without reflecting: 'Certainly, if I may lie with yours.' Where to the other replied: 'But what would you? She is so thin, you would not find her at all to your taste.' The gentleman answered: 'Marry, I will lard her so fairly that she shall be tasty enough.'

Many other dames there be whose fair winsome faces lead men to desire their bodies; but once arrived thereat, they are found so skinny that pleasure and temptation are soon blown over. In others we may find, so to speak, *cross-bars*, the bones being so sharp and fleshless that they will chafe and gall a man's naked body more than a mule's pack-saddle upon him. To amend which, certain ladies will commonly make use of little cushions, very soft and delicate, to bear the burden and prevent chafing: & indeed I have heard of some who use these, as well as drawers skilfully padded & made of satin, so that those uninitiated, coming to touch them, find all things pleasant, and dream not that it is other than natural plumpness, for above the satin, there will be little drawers of loose white linen, so that the lover, having his will of the lady without stripping her, would leave her content and satisfied that he had found a fine mistress.

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Others there be who have the skin all worn and veined like marble, or like mosaic work, mottled like fawns, itchy, and subject to sores and farcins, and, in brief, so disfigured that the sight is far from pleasant.

¶ I have heard tell of a great lady, whom I knew and still know, who is all over rough and hairy, on the chest, on the stomach, on the shoulders and all down the spine, and on her bottom, like a savage. I will leave you to imagine her appearance. If the proverb be true that one hairy after this fashion is either rich or wanton, this lady, I do assure you, is both, and is well aware of how best to yield herself, to be gazed on and desired.

Others again have skin like goose-flesh or like a feathered starling, furrowed and cross-grained, and as black as the devil. Others are embellished with great swinging bosoms, which hang down worse than a cow's when she feeds her calf. These are not of a surety the fair breasts of Helen, who desiring one day to present to the Temple of Diana a handsome cup in fulfilment of a vow, caused the goldsmith who fashioned it to model it on one of her beautiful breasts, who made the cup of white gold, so that none knew which to admire the more, whether the cup itself or its likeness to the fair bosom whence he had designed it, for it looked so sweet and dainty that art made one the more desire the natural. Pliny speaks of it specifically where he treats of the existence of white gold. For strange as it may be, it was of white gold that this cup was made.

But he who would wish to model golden cups on the enormous breasts I have spoken of must furnish much gold for the goldsmith, and for all this expense there would be derision enough when it was told: Lo, here a cup modelled on the breast of So-and-so. For they would be less like drinking-cups than great round wooden troughs, such as they use to feed the swine.

And there are others whose nipples bear a close resemblance to rotten apples. Others again, to descend lower, whose bellies are so wrinkled & rough that one might take them for old leathern pouches, such as sergeants & innkeepers carry; which may happen to women who have borne children, and who have not been properly rubbed and greased by the

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midwives with whale's fat. But some there are whose bellies are as fair and smooth, and their breasts as dainty, as though they were still maiden. ¶ To go still lower down, others there be whose natural parts are hideous and distasteful. Some may have the hair not curly, but so long and straight that you might think them the moustaches of a Saracen. Yet they do not remove this lavish growth, but prefer to have it so since the proverb says: A grass-grown lane is a fine road to ride. I have heard tell of a certain great lady who keeps hers so.

I have heard speak of another fair and honest lady who had the same so long that she would have it wound round with cords or ribbons of silk, of crimson and other colours, and would have it curled like the curls of a wig, and then tied to her thighs; and in this wise would shew herself to her husband and her lover. Or may be she would untwist the cord or the ribbon so that it would remain in curl, and looking more charming so than otherwise.

Wherein was much that was strange & wanton, for being unable herself to make and produce her curls she must perforce employ one of her women, and she the most favoured, to attend on her, whence there could only arise lasciviousness of every sort which one may imagine.

Other women, on the contrary, delight to keep this place smooth and shaven like the beard of a priest.

There be some women who have no hair at all here, or but little, as I have heard tell of a very great and beautiful lady of my acquaintance: which is not a fair sight, and gives rise to an evil conjecture: thus there be men who have but a wisp of beard on the chin who are no more esteemed of good blood as are albinos both men and women.

Other women are provided with an entrance so ample, so large and wide, that one might take it for the cave of the Sibyls, as I have heard tell of some great ladies, who have it as capacious as a mare, however they may try by artifice to narrow the door: but after two or three bouts, the same great opening appears; and what is more, I have heard that if one were to regard the thing, it would close like that of a mare in heat. I have

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been told of three such which would close if one were to watch them.

I have heard tell of a great lady, very fair and of high birth, to whom one of our Kings gave a very quaint nickname, since it was so large and wide, and not without cause, for during her life she had it measured over and over again by many mercers and surveyors, and the more she tried in the day to narrow it, faith, two hours of the night would undo all she had done, like Penelope's tapestry. In the end she discarded all artifices, and made the best of the matter by choosing a man of the largest proportions.

A good remedy too, as I have heard tell of a fair and honest damsel at Court, who was on the other hand so small & narrow that they despaired of forcing her virginity: but on the advice of certain doctors and midwives, or of her friends, whether men or women, she had the opening or breach first made by one of the smallest and slenderest casts, and so to larger ones, & then to great ones, after the bias had been made, as Rabelais ordered to be done with the impregnable walls of *Paris*: and so by such attempts, one after the other, she grew so well accustomed to all that at last the very greatest ceased to cause her the fear which at the outset the smallest had done.

A great foreign Princess whom I knew had the same so small and constricted that she preferred not to taste these joys rather than have an incision made, as the doctors advised her. Marry, a fine example of continence, and a rare one!

In others the *labia* are more long and dangling, and such girls and women would be content enough in Persia, though not in Turkey, since in Persia women are circumcised because their natural organ in some strange manner resembles the virile member; in Turkey, on the contrary, this is not done, wherefore the Persians call them heretics, in that they are not circumcised, nor has their organ any shape; neither do they take pleasure in gazing thereon as Christians do. So say those who have travelled in the East.

This same physician declared that women & girls of this sort are often given over to frigging, *donna con donna*.

of Gallant Ladies

I have heard tell of one of the fairest ladies who was ever at Court, who had them by no means so long, for they had been docked through a disease which she caught of her husband: indeed, she had a lip on one side alone, for the other had been eaten away by chancres, so that she might be called mutilated and half dismembered. Nevertheless this lady has been sought of many lovers, and has sometimes lain with a very great personage. One day at Court a certain nobleman said that he wished his wife were like her, and were only provided with half, so much too much had she.

I have heard speak of another, of a hundred times higher rank, who had a rupture which caused a finger's-length to hang down outside her affair, due to her being ill handled (folk said) by the midwife at one of her lyings-in. This may often happen to girls and women who have been brought to bed by stealth, or who have been injured or damaged by accident. For this reason one of the most beautiful women of the great world, whom I knew, who becoming a widow would never wed again, lest this should be discovered by a second husband, who might take it in bad part and maybe illtreat her.

This great lady of whom I have just spoken, notwithstanding her accident, could bear children as easily as she could make water, for it was said that her organ was very capacious. But though she was well loved and served by her gallants, she would ever be chary of shewing this part.

Hence it would seem certain, that when a fair and honest lady sets herself to love and private intercourse, yet refuses to reveal this part of her to the sight and touch, she has assuredly some blemish there, or for some reason the sight and touch of it will bring no pleasure, as I have been told by a certain honourable lady, for if there be none, and all be fair and seemly (and truly there be many that are delightful to see and handle) she is as eager and happy to shew it and court caresses as to shew any other of her beauties, the more for her own reputation, that she be not suspected of some imperfection or deformity in that place, than for the pleasure which she herself takes in gazing on and admiring it, and most of all to

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increase the desire and passion of her lover. Nor are hands and eyes like the vile member, which can make wives harlots and their husbands cuckolds, though after the mouth these have most to do with a successful conquest of the place.

Other women there be whose lower mouth is so pale that one would think they had the fever, and such are like certain drunkards, who drink more wine than a sucking-pig, yet are as pale as a corpse, whence folk call them traitors to their wine, being unlike those sots whose faces are ruddy. So might these women be called traitors to Venus, were it not for the saying: A pale whore and a red-faced rake. Nevertheless it is not pleasant to see this part so pale and chill, which in no wise resembles that of one of the fairest dames I have ever seen, of very high birth, who 'twas said, commonly wore three fine colours there together: scarlet, white & black, for her lower mouth was coloured as red as coral, & the hair about it prettily curled & black as ebony (which should be with everyone, for it is a great beauty), & the skin was as white as alabaster, fairly shadowed by the dark hair. Indeed a fair sight, unlike those others which I have mentioned.

There are others again whose natures are so low placed and cleft up to the very rump, and most frequently little women, that one might scruple to touch them, for various foul and unclean reasons which I had rather not name: for so to speak, when the two streams meet and almost touch each other, there is danger of leaving one channel & navigating another: a thing altogether too offensive.

I have heard a tale of Madame de Fontaine-Chalandry, who was named the fair Torcy, that her mistress, Queen Eleanor, being robed and attired, would appear a most beautiful Princess, of a fine & shapely stature, as many would affirm who had seen her at Court; but once unclothed she looked a very giantess in body, so long and huge it was, but below she seemed naught but a dwarf, with her short thighs & legs & other parts.

Another great lady of whom I have heard tell was in all respects the contrary; since in body she shewed herself a dwarf, for it was short and

undersized, while lower down she was veily a giantess or a colossus, so enormously long and high-forked were her thighs and legs, albeit well-covered and proportioned, so that she could cover up her man beneath her, if he were slightly built, with the greatest ease, like the draw-net of a pointer.

There are many husbands and lovers among us Christians, who desire to differ in every way from the Turks, who take no pleasure in gazing on a lady's fancy, for they say, as I have told before, that it has no shape. But on the contrary we Christians find great pleasure, folk say, in regarding it, and take delight in such sights. Nor do men delight only in seeing them, but also in kissing them, as many a lady has told & revealed to her lover. Whereto a Spanish dame made answer to her lover, who was leaving her one day saying, *Bezo las manos y los pies, Señora*, (I kiss your hands and your feet), *Señor, en el medio esta la mejor estacion*, (Sir, the middle is the better place), signifying that he might kiss her middle as well as her hands and her feet. And in this practice, certain ladies declare that their husbands & gallants find a delicate pleasure, & are the more enamoured. I have heard like wise of a very great Prince, the son of a powerful King, who had taken a famous Princess as his mistress, that he would never touch her without gazing on this part, and kissing it many times. And the first time he did so he was persuaded to it by a great lady, a favourite of the King, who one day when all three were together, and the Prince was toying with his love, asked him if he had never seen this fair place which so delighted him. He answered that he had not, whereupon she said: 'Then you have done naught, and know nothing of that which you love. Your pleasure is still imperfect; you must see it.' Thus, he was fain to do, but the lady proved intractable, the other coming behind seized her and turned her over on the bed, holding her so until the Prince should have contemplated it at his ease and kissed it his fill, so fair and sweet did he find it. And so begun, the practice went on.

¶ Others there are whose thighs are so ill proportioned, so misshapen and badly formed, that they deserve neither to be regarded nor desired;

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and as for their legs, they are the same, and oftentimes so gross that one might say they are like the belly of a coney with young. Others again have them so shrunk and meagre, as thin as a heron's, that you would sooner take them for flutes than for a woman's thighs and legs. And what the rest is like I will leave you to think.

They are all unlike a fair and honest lady of whom I have heard tell, plump enough yet not too stout (for there should be moderation in all things), who having lain one night with her lover, asked him the next morning how he had found her. He replied that he had had great delight and much pleasure of her fair plump flesh. 'Well, at least,' said she, 'you have ridden your stage without having to borrow a cushion.'

Other ladies there be who have one or another hidden blemish, as I have heard tell of one, a dame of good repute, whose excreta were voided from the front, the reason for which was, so a competent doctor told me when I asked, that she had been deflowered too young by one too robust and well-furnished. This was a great pity, for she was a very beautiful woman, and a widow, whom an honourable gentleman of my acquaintance wished to espouse; but on learning of this blemish he suddenly left her, and another took her.

I have heard speak of a gallant gentleman who was wedded to one of the most beautiful women of the Court, for whom he cared nothing. Another less scrupulous than he, having lain with her, discovered so strong a stench that none could abide the odour, whence he understood the husband's difficulty.

Others there are who cannot hold in their urine, & must for ever keep a little sponge between their legs, as I have known of two very great ladies, of whom one while yet a maid did suddenly make water in the ballroom, which brought much scandal upon her.

I have heard of another great lady, who on being taken by a lover, would make water willy-nilly, either at the time or just after, like a mare which has been leapt: such as these should have a pail of water thrown over them, as they do with mares, to make them retain it.

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Many others there are who are commonly in blood, whether at their monthly periods or at all other times; & others who are tainted, spotted, marked and scarred, either by the hazard of a pox contracted from their husbands or their lovers, or by their own bad habits and humours; some have their limbs marked by lupus & other deformities, or by birth-marks caused by the longings of their mothers while carrying them. So have I been told of one whose body is half red and half white, like the uniform of a city officer.

Others again are so profuse of their menstrual fluid that their nature will constantly discharge like a sheep with its throat cut, which is hardly pleasing to husbands or lovers, considering the frequent & assiduous worship which Venus ordains in these sports; for if they are sweet & clean one week out of the month, that is all. Thus they lose the rest of the year, wherein out of the twelve months, they may have not more than five or six, or even less. It is indeed too much; like our soldiers who at pay day are cheated by the Commissioners & Paymasters of four months & more out the twelve, by extending each month to forty or fifty days, so that the twelve months of the year are reduced to no more than eight. In the same case do husbands and lovers find themselves whose ladies are in this plight unless perchance, to ease their wanton desires, they are willing to soil themselves shamefully, with no sense of disgrace. Moreover, the children which come of such embraces are not healthy, and suffer in many ways.

If I were to recount all the blemishes & deformities I have heard of, I should never be done; moreover the tales would be too foul & displeasing: but I repeat what I have said, that I write not of paltry & common women but of great and well-born ladies, whose fair faces would make the world to swoon for love of them—but not their persons which are clothed.

¶ But one more little tale I will tell, a pleasant one, related to me by a gentleman of my acquaintance. While lying once with a very beautiful lady of some position, and engaged in his task, he discovered in that part certain hairs so sharp and prickly that he found it difficult to finish, so much was he discommoded by them. But at last, being done, he was for

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feeling with his hand, and he discovered that all round her *motte* there were half a dozen of these hairs, so long, sharp, stiff and bristling, that they would have served the purposes of a cobbler, as pigs' bristles do. He begged to see the place, which the lady was very loth to allow, but permitted him, and there he found it all surrounded by these bristles, exactly as you may see a medal ringed round with diamonds and rubies, which is set as a sign in a hat or a cap.

¶ It is no long while since in a certain part of *Guyenne*, a married lady, of good family and position, while she was superintending her children's studies, was suddenly assailed by their tutor, who seized by a frenzy or mania, or may be by a fierce rage of desire which overcame him, caught up her husband's sword which lay on the bed, and wielded it so well that he pierced her thighs & the two *labia* of her nature right across, of which she would have died, had it not been for the aid of a skilful surgeon. Her affair might well complain that it had been through two divers wars and two different attacks. I believe the sight afterwards was hardly pleasant, since it was so slashed and its wings so broken. I say *wings*, for while the Greeks name the *labia hymenæa*, the Romans call them *alae*, or wings; and we ourselves *labia*, or lips, and various other words; but to my mind they are rightly called wings, for there is neither bird nor beast, whether a foolish & untrained falcon, like that of our young maidens, or whether a hawk, be it wild or well-practised, as of our married women & widows, which flies swifter or has more active wings.

I might well agree with Rabelais in calling it an animal, since it moves of itself, and either by sight or touch, one may find it to move and stir of itself, when it is desirous.

Some women there be, who for fear of rheum & catarrh, muffle themselves up in bed with coverings and kerchiefs about the head, until, faith, they look like old witches: though out of bed and finely clothed they are as elegant as any professional beauty: others also there be who are painted like images, fair enough by day, but at night with the paint off they are more like scarecrows.

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It were better to view such ladies before loving, wedding and enjoying them, as did Octavius Cæsar, for together with his friends he had certain great ladies and Roman matrons stripped naked, as also virgins of an age to marry, and examined them all over, as if they had been slaves & serfs sold by a certain dealer named Toranus, whose business this was; and if he found them to his mind without blemish, he would enjoy them.

So also do the Turks in their slave-market at *Constantinople* & in other large towns, when they are buying slaves of either sex.

Now, I will say no more of this, for indeed I think to have said too much already. But after this fashion are we deceived in many a sight which we have thought and imagined very fair. But if we are so sadly deceived in certain ladies, we are equally delighted & satisfied with many others, and these are so beautiful, so neat and dainty, so fresh and dimpled, so plump & desirable; in a word, so perfect in every part of their bodies, that after them all other worldly sights are deceitful and vain. Whence there are men who in contemplating such sights lose their heads and think only of consummation. Further, it is often enough that these ladies take pleasure in shewing themselves, and without any protest, knowing themselves to bear no blemish or defect, to the end that they may stir a man to temptation and wantonness.

¶ One day when we were at the siege of *La Rochelle*, the late M. de Guise, who honoured me with his friendship, came to shew me some tablets which he had just appropriated from the King's brother, our general, and taking them from his breeches' pocket, said to me: 'Monsieur has recently displeased me and made a jest of my love for a certain lady, and I would have my revenge: see what I have written in his tablets.' He gave them to me, and I saw written in his hand these four lines which he had just composed:

If you have not known me,
The fault was not in me,
Since naked I have shewn me,
And shewn all you need see.

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He then named the lady, or rather girl (for I suspected that she was yet unmarried) and I told him that I was greatly astonished to hear that the Prince had neither touched nor possessed her, since he had had many an opportunity, and he was commonly reported to have done so. But he assured me that it was not so, and that it could only have been by his own fault. I answered him: 'Then, Monsieur, it must have been either that he was so weary and surfeited elsewhere that he could not do his part, or that he was so ravished by the contemplation of her naked beauty that he gave not a thought to the action.' 'Possibly,' he replied, 'he could have accomplished it; but however it fell out, he failed at the test. So I intend to make a mockery of him, and I am going to put the tablets back in his pocket, which according to his custom he will examine anon, and there he will read what I have written, so, look you, I shall have my revenge.' This he did, & they were never again together without laughing together over it, and making game of each other in a merry fashion. For in those days there was great friendship and intimacy between them, though later on they were so curiously estranged.

¶ A lady of the great world, or rather a young girl, being intimately loved of a very great Princess, this latter was one day resting in bed, as was her custom, when there came to see her a gentleman who was deeply enamoured of her, though he had naught but his love of her to his credit. This lady who was so dearly loved and intimate with the Princess, approached her gently as she lay in bed, and without appearing to be about it, she suddenly pulled off all the coverings, so that the gentleman, who used his eyes in no idle manner, gazing upon her (as he told me afterwards) saw there the most beautiful thing which he had ever seen or ever would see, in this fair naked body, and her fine limbs, and the sweet white flesh, so that he thought to have seen the beauties of Paradise. But that did not last long, for just so soon as the coverlet was turned back it was seized by the lady, the girl having run away; but by good hazard, the more the fair lady tried to replace the coverings the more she allowed herself to be seen; which by no means spoiled the sight nor the pleasure

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of the gentleman, who made no haste to her assistance—he had been a sorry fool else! However, by some means or other she managed to cover herself again, gently reproaching the gill, and saying that she should pay for it. The young girl replied, drawing a little aside: ‘Madam, you once played me a trick; I pray you pardon me if I have played one on you,’ and slipping through the door she disappeared. But peace was soon made between them.

The gentleman, however, was so delighted with the sight, and in such an ecstasy of pleasure and contentment, that I have heard him declare a hundred times that he had no other desire all his life but to live over again the affair in his imagination: and truly he was right, for that fair face unequalled in beauty, and the lovely throat that has bewitched the world, might shew well enough that below matters yet more exquisite were hidden. He added that among all her other beauties this lady possessed the finest thighs he had ever seen; which she very well might, for she was of a full rich figure, which among all other charms is supreme, and as necessary as a frontier fortress.

After the gentleman had recounted all his tale, I could only advise him: ‘Live, then, my friend, live on; with this divine contemplation and this bliss to dream over, you should never die. And would that I might also before death see so fair a sight.’

This gentleman was ever after under an obligation to the lady, whom he honoured & loved with all his heart to the end of his days. But though he served her most faithfully yet he did not marry her, for another took her who was richer than he; for it is women’s way to pursue wealth.

Such sights are fair and delightful; but one must take care they do no harm, remembering the beautiful Diana who was seen naked by poor Acteon, and another of whom I will tell

¶ A great and famous King loved in his time a very fair and honourable great lady, a widow, so much that folk deemed him bewitched; for he cared little for other women, or for his wife, except in rare intervals, and this lady would always first pick the finest flowers of his garden, which

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greatly angered the Queen, who knew herself to be as fair and pleasing, & as worthy to be served & to enjoy such dainty fare as another, wherefore she was both amazed and angry at the affair. Having complained of it to a great lady who was a favourite of hers, she plotted with her to find a way by which she could spy through a peep-hole upon the games which her husband and the lady should play together. Whereto she had made several holes in the ceiling of the said lady's chamber, to see the whole matter and the life they led together: and so they fell to observing the spectacle, wherein they saw naught but what was fair, for they perceived a very beautiful woman, white and fresh and delicately made, half covered by her shift and half naked, caressing her lover with every sort of wanton fondling, and he her. And anon they would leave the bed, and in their shifts alone would lie together and toy on the thick carpet beside the bed, so to avoid the heat of it, and the better to cool themselves in the air, for it was at the hottest time of the year. So have I known a very great Prince who after this manner would enjoy his wife, who was among the fairest of all the world, in order to escape the heat wrought by the over great warmth of the summer, as he himself would tell.

Upon all this the Queen, having seen and perceived everything, out of sheer vexation began to weep & sigh, with sobs & tears, for it seemed to her, as she said, that her husband had never done the like with her, nor played the amorous tricks with her that she had seen him do with the other.

The lady who accompanied her did her best to console her, and remonstrated with her for plaining so, saying that since she had been so curious as to see these things, she could scarce hope for less. Whereto the Queen replied only: 'Alas, yes! I set my heart on seeing what I should not have seen, for the sight has grieved me sore.' However, having been consoled and having composed her mind, she brooded over it no more, but continued as often as she might with this pastime of the peep-hole, out of which she gained not a little entertainment, and may be other things as well.

of Gallant Ladies

¶ I have heard tell of a high born lady of the great world, one of the very greatest, who was not content with her natural lasciviousness—for she was a thorough whore, married and now a widow, and very fair to boot. so to provoke and excite her passions, she would have her ladies, wives & maidens alike, stripped naked, the very fairest among them, & would greatly delight to see them. and anon she would beat them with the flat of her hand on their bottoms with great slaps & spankings, sound blows enough, and girls who had committed some fault with good birch-rods. Whence she had much contentment in seeing them move and wriggle their bodies and their haunches, which, according to the smacks they received, appeared a strange and amusing sight.

At other times, without stripping them, she would make them tuck up their petticoats, (for in those times they wore no drawers), and would slap and whip their bottoms, for that they had offended her, or perhaps to make them laugh, or else cry. And by these sights & contemplations, she would sharpen her appetite so finely that afterwards she would away to satisfy it with a good heart, with some fine, strong, robust gallant.

Truly a strange humour! Indeed, it is said that one day on seeing from the window of her castle, which gave upon the street, a great stout cobbler endowed with strange proportions, pissing against the wall of the castle, she ardently desired a thing so fine the large; so for fear of losing the fruit she longed for, she sent him a message that he was to meet her in some secret avenue in the park, & there she gave herself to him, with the result that he got her with child. In such wise did sight serve this lady.

Moreover, I have heard say that as well as the women and girls that were customarily of her suite, those stranger ladies who came to see her, were in two or three days, or every time they visited her, taught this game, her own women first shewing the way, & the others after them. Whereat some were amazed at the game, others not. Of a truth a pleasant sport!

I have heard tell likewise of a great lord who took pleasure in so seeing his wife, whether naked or clothed, & in whipping her with great smacks, and watching her wriggle under the blows.

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I have heard another tale of an honourable lady who as a girl was beaten twice a day by her mother, for no transgression, but because, she supposed, her mother took pleasure in so seeing her wriggle her body and her buttocks, which stirred up a finer appetite for other delights; and the nearer she approached to the age of fourteen, the more violent she became whenever she came near her and saw her so.

I have heard even worse of a great Lord & Prince, who was over eighty years of age, who before cohabiting with his wife would have himself beaten, being unable to move or to lift his drooping organ without this absurd remedy. I should much like some wise physician to tell me the reason.

The great author, Pico della Mirandola, tells a tale of having seen a certain gallant of his time, who, the more he was beaten with severe blows of stirrup-leather, the fiercer he was after women; nor did he ever acquit himself so well as when he had been so thrashed; after the which he would become infuriated. Marry, there be some of strange humours! But at least it is more diverting to see others beaten than this last.

¶ When I was at *Milan*, I was one day told an amusing story: how that the late Marquis de Pescaire, who died not long ago, when Viceroy of Sicily, became desperately enamoured of a most beautiful lady: wherefore one morning, thinking that her husband was gone out of doors, he went to visit her and found her a-bed. But in all his discourse with her, he had no more of her than the sight and contemplation of her at ease under the coverlet, and the touching of her with his hand. Upon these doings the husband entered in, who was in no single respect the equal of the Marquis, surprising them so suddenly that the Marquis had no time to withdraw his glove, which had gone astray, I know not how, among the sheets, as may often happen. Presently, having talked with him awhile, he left the chamber, conducted by the husband, who on his return by chance discovered the lost glove among the bedclothes, which the lady had not yet noticed. He took it and locked it up; whereafter, preserving a cold manner towards his wife, for a long while he would

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neither touch her nor sleep with her. Anon one day, when she was alone in her chamber, taking up a pen she wrote the following quatrain:

*Vigna era, vigna son.
Era podata, or piu non son;
E non so per qual cagion
Non mi poda il mio patron.*

This verse being left on her table, the husband saw it, and taking the pen he wrote in answer:

*Vigna eri, vigna sei,
Eri podata, e piu non sei.
Per la granfa del leon,
Non ti poda il tuo patron.*

and left this also on the table. The whole thing was conveyed to the Marquis, who in his turn wrote:

*A la vigna chez voi dite
Io fui, e qui restai;
Alzai il pampano; guardai la vite;
Ma, se Dio m'ajuti, non toccai.*

This was once more shewn to the husband, who, satisfied with so honourable a response and so full an apology, fell to cultivating his vine as assiduously as before, so that never were husband & wife of such accord.

These verses I will translate from the Italian, that all may understand:

I was a fair vine once; so I remain,
And of old time was cultivated well.
But now the husbandman comes not again
To cultivate me: why I cannot tell.

The husband answers:

Aye, you were such a vine, and are so still,
But cultivation is no more for you.
The lion's claw has turned your husband's will
From tending you as he was wont to do.

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The Marquis answers:

As to the vine of which you speak in suit,
I saw it, true, and tarried by the wall;
Lifted a cluster, gazed upon the fruit,
But so God help me, touched it not at all.

By the lion's claw is meant the glove which the husband found lost among the sheets.

A good husband, in sooth, who was not too deeply offended, and who ceasing to suspect his wife, pardoned her. And of a truth there be ladies who take delight in gazing upon themselves naked, and are ravished to behold their own loveliness, like Narcissus. What then can a man do in contemplating and regarding the same?

¶ When Herod's wife Mariamn , a fair and honest lady, was desired by her husband to lie with him in broad daylight, that he might see all her charms, she refused outright, so Joseph tells us. Nor did he insist on his rights as a husband, as did a great Lord of my acquaintance with his wife, who was very beautiful, and whom he took in the full light of day, stripping her naked, for all her violent protests. Afterwards, when he sent her women to dress her again, they found her in tears and full of shame. On the other hand, there are many ladies who make no great scruple to shew their beauty openly, and to display themselves naked, the more to enflame and intoxicate their lovers, and to draw them ever the more ardently to them. Yet they will in no wise permit them this most precious favour—or some at least, and for some long time. Others again, not willing to halt on so pleasant a road, are fain to pass on, as I have heard tell of many who at first would delight their gallants with the fair sight of them alone.

Happy are they who submit with patience, yielding little to temptation. But a man must needs be almost crazed with virtue who seeing a fair woman, will not feast his eyes upon her. Alexander the Great was used to say the like to his friends, how that the maids of Persia did great

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hurt to the eyes of any who looked on them; wherefore when he took prisoner the daughters of King Darius, he would never greet them save with his eyes lowered, & this as rarely as he could, for fear of being overwhelmed by their astonishing beauty.

Nor is it only of old time, but in our own days, that among all Eastern women the Persians bear the palm for beauty & fair proportions of body and natural charm, their dress and footgear being all that is right and fitting, and above all in their ancient and royal city of *Shiraz*, where they are so lauded for their beauty, their white skins and gracio is ways, that it is said in one ancient and familiar proverb of the Moors that the prophet Mahomet would never go to *Shiraz*, fearing that he might on a time see one of these fair women, wherefore after his death his soul would never enter Paradise. Those who have visited the city and written of it say the same, wherein we may well mark the hypocrisy of the dissolute & scoundrelly old prophet; as though it were not written of him (as Belon tells us) in an Arab work entitled: *Of the good customs of Mahomet*, praising the vigour of his body, that he would boast of enjoying and satisfying every one of his eleven wives, and all within the same hour, one after another. To the devil with the old rascal! Let us speak no more of him.

I have heard it questioned concerning the behaviour of Alexander, of which I have just spoken, and that of Scipio Africanus: which of the two should deserve the greater praise for his continence?

Alexander, distrusting the strength of his own chastity, would not even see those fair dames of Persia: Scipio having taken *New Carthage*, looked upon the fair Spanish girl which his soldiers led before him and offered as part of his booty, and who being in the flower of her age and of marvellous beauty would make men's eyes to brighten with admiration wherever she went, and even those of Scipio, who having greeted her courteously, enquired of her from what city of Spain were she and her family. He was told among other things that she was betrothed to a young man named Alucius, Prince of the Celtiberians, to whom he rendered her up, and to her father and mother, without even touching her;

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wherein the lady, her parents and her betrothed were so beholden to him that they were ever afterwards very well disposed towards the city of *Rome* and to the republic. Yet who may know whether in her heart the fair girl had no desire to be first penetrated and subdued by Scipio, in his youth and beauty, a brave and valiant victor? It may be indeed that had one of her most intimate friends asked her in the name of her faith and conscience whether she had not wished it, one may imagine what her reply would have been, or at least that she would have made some little sign that she had desired it. For we may guess how the hot climate and the westering sun of Spain would have ripened her beauty, as it does that of many dames in that fair country, and rendered her ardent and athirst for love, as I have seen numbers. Can we then doubt that if the beautiful damsel had been wooed and solicited of the handsome young Scipio, she would not have taken him at his word, aye, & on the altar of her heathen gods.

Wherein has Scipio been highly praised of some by reason of his great gift of continence; by others he has been derided: for how better can a brave and valiant cavalier shew the generosity of his heart towards a fair and honourable lady than by shewing to her in very deed that he prizes her beauty and loves her dearly, rather than by employing towards her a manner of cold respect, modesty and discretion, which I have often heard many a dame and gallant to declare, is rather stupidity and feebleness of spirit than virtue? Nay, 'tis not this that fair ladies love in their hearts, but rather a frank enjoying of them, and service that is faithful and discreet. To sum up the matter, as an honourable dame once said on reading the story, this Scipio was but a fool, brave and noble captain as he was, to win over any to himself & to *Rome* by means so foolish, when he might have accomplished the same end by others more pleasant, inasmuch as it was the fair spoils of war, wherein a man should enjoy his triumph as much or more than anything else in the world.

The great Founder of *Rome* did not so when the fair Sabine dames were raped, but took his share in all that was done, according to his own

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good pleasure, without respect for any, which the lady found pleasing enough, neither did she fret over it, nor her companions, who yielded with a good grace to their new husbands and ravishers, making no outcry like their fathers and mothers, who were goaded by this to a bitter war of reprisals.

¶ It is true enough that people are not all alike, and women too, some of whom desire not at all to submit to anyone after this fashion, nor do all women resemble the wife of King Ortiagon, one of the Galatian Kings in Asia Minor. She was of most perfect beauty, and having been taken prisoner by a Roman centurion, who wooed her to her own dishonour, she firmly refusing, having a horror of prostituting herself to him, a creature so vile and base. Whereupon he took her by force and violence, since she had become his slave by the chances and fortunes of war, of which he soon repented when vengeance fell on him, for the Queen had promised him a great ransom for her liberty, and both being come to the appointed place for him to receive the money, she had him killed while he was counting it out, and carried off his head to her husband, to whom she freely confessed that the centurion had in truth violated her chastity, for which she had avenged herself after this fashion. Wherein her husband approved her, and honoured her greatly for the act. And from that time onward (says the tale) she kept her honour unstained to the last day of her life, with all sobriety and saintliness. But at any rate she had enjoyed a pretty morsel, for all that it came from a churlish fellow.

Lucretia again did otherwise, for she savoured not the pleasure at all, though she was wooed by a gallant King; wherein she was doubly a fool, not to yield to him straightway for a while, as also to kill herself.

¶ To turn again to Scipio; he knew naught, to all appearance, of the custom of war concerning booty and pillage, for (by all I have heard from one of our great captains) there is no dainty in the world like a woman taken in war. And he would make great mock of his companions, many of whom were resolved beyond all else, in assaults and the sacking of towns, on guarding women's honour, as also in other encounters. For

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women love a soldier better than all other men, and their very violence stirs in them the greater appetite. Nor can we wonder; the pleasure is theirs, the honour of their husbands & themselves is in no way smirched—yet what a to-do about their ruin! And what is more, these will oftentimes save the lives and wealth of their husbands, as did the fair Eunoé, the wife of Bogud or Bocchus, the King of Mauretania, whom Cæsar endowed with great gifts and likewise her husband; not so much, we may imagine for having served his party, as did Juba, the King of Bithynia, that of Pompey, as that she was a beautiful woman, and Cæsar had great joy and delight of her.

I will not enumerate all the other conveniences of these loves, in spite of which (so my friend the gallant captain would declare) his companions and fellows would amuse themselves by observing ancient rules and customs of warfare, such as preserving the honour of women, of whom they might at least have learnt in confidence their own secret wishes, & afterwards made up their minds what to do. But may be they were all of the nature of our friend Scipio, who resembled the gardener's dog, which could not eat the cabbages in the garden and would not allow anyone else to do so. So did he treat poor Massinissa, who had so many times risked his life for him and for the people of *Rome*, who had so struggled, sweated and laboured for his glory and victory, and all to the end that he was refused the fair Queen Sophonisba, whom he had taken and chosen as his chief and most precious booty. Instead she was sent to *Rome*, where she would have lived her life a miserable slave had not Massinissa found a way to save her. How much greater & nobler would have been the glory to Scipio had she gone to *Rome* as a fair and stately Queen, the wife of Massinissa, that the people might say when she went by: 'Ah! there goes one of the fairest conquests of Scipio,' for verily glory lies more in the display of that which is great and magnificent than in that which is mean and slavish.

In a word, Scipio committed grave faults throughout, whether because he hated the whole female sex, or because he was impotent in satisfying

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them; although it is told of him that in his old age he used to make love to one of his wife's maids: all of which she bore very patiently, for reasons which might well be a proof of his impotence.

¶ But now to leave this bypath into which I have strayed, and to pursue the plain road I left behind, I will say once more in conclusion that no sight on earth is so fair to see & contemplate as a beautiful woman superbly attired, or else a-bed in delicate undress, so she be whole & sweet, without spot or blemish, as I have already said.

King Francis used to say that no gentleman however lordly could better receive a nobleman however great, in his house or his castle, than by offering first to his sight a fair woman, a fine horse, and a good hound: for in letting his eyes rove from one to the other, and anon on the third, he would never grow a-weary of such a house, where were these three most beautiful and pleasant sights on which his eyes could rest.

Queen Isabella of Castile was wont to say that her great delight was to see four things: *Hombre d'armas en campo, obispo puesto en pontifical, linda dama en la cama, y ladrón en la borca*—a man at arms in the field, a bishop in his purple, a fair dame a-bed, and a thief on the gallows.

I have heard the late Cardinal of Lorraine, who died not long ago, relate how on his way to *Rome* to the Court of Pope Paul IV, to break off the truce made with the Emperor, he passed through *Venice*, where he was received with every honour (as we can have no doubt, since he was so close a favourite of the great king), & where the great & noble Senate of the city came forth to meet him. Anon, passing by the Grand Canal, where the windows of every house were crowded with fairest ladies of the city, assembled there to see the state entry, there was a certain great noble who conversed with him at great length upon affairs of state, but presently seeing the Cardinal was for ever gazing upon these fair ladies, he said to him in his own dialect: 'I observe, my Lord Cardinal, that you heed me not, and with reason enough, for there is far greater pleasure to be found in viewing these beautiful dames at the windows, and delighting in the sight, than in listening to the talk of a tedious old man like me, even

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though he may speak of some great scheme to your advantage.' The Cardinal, who lacked neither wit nor memory, repeated to him at once all that he had said, word for word, leaving the old fellow mightily pleased with him, and full of admiration that for all his gazing on the fair dames of *Venice*, he had forgotten and neglected no word of all that was said to him.

Those who have seen the Court of our French Kings, Francis I, Henry II, and his sons, will readily avow that no man whoever he may be, and though he have seen all the world, can have seen a fairer sight than the ladies of the Court, the Queens and Princesses, their wives and mothers and sisters; but as has been said, yet a fairer sight would be, were only Master Gonnin's grandsire living yet, who by his wizardry, his spells & enchantments, could have shewn all these ladies stripped naked, as folk say he did once in a private company at the order of King Francis; for he was a subtle man & skilled in his art, whose grandson, whom we have seen, knew naught at all beside him.

Methinks this sight would be as diverting as was of old time that of the Egyptian dames at *Alexandria*, at the ceremonial worship of their great god Apis, to greet whom they would march forth in great state, lifting up their robes, their petticoats & shifts, as high as ever they could, striding with legs wide apart, so as to shew their affair to the god, which they believed to give him great satisfaction. He who would read this tale must turn to the sixth book of Alexander ab Alexandro, the *Dies Jovialis*. Such a sight must have been to my mind most pleasant, for in those times the ladies of *Alexandria* were full as fair as they are to-day.

No matter if the old and ugly did likewise, for a man's gaze should rest only on that which is fair, and fly the ugly as often as may be.

In Switzerland, the men and women bathe together without hurt, contenting themselves with putting a linen cloth before them, yet there one may still see sights which please or displease, according as the lady is fair or foul.

¶ One word more, before this part of my discourse closes. We may well

imagine to what temptations and ravishments of sight were exposed of old time the young lords, the knights and gentlemen, plebians and other Romans, on the day when the rites of Flora were celebrated in *Rome*. For Flora, so folk tell, was the most alluring and flaunting courtesan who ever played the whore in that city, or indeed in any other. And what made her the more desired was that she was of an ancient house and good lineage; for herein are ladies of high birth the more pleasing and delightful to those that have ado with them than others.

In this wise was the lady Flora more to be prized than Laïs, who would give herself to all the world like a common harlot, while Flora yielded only to the great. Indeed, she had inscribed round the portal of her door. 'Kings, Princes, dictators, consuls, censors, pontiffs, quæstors, ambassadors and other great nobles, enter: but none other.'

It was the practice of Laïs ever to demand payment beforehand, but not so Flora, who declared that the great and illustrious would do by her as she did by them, and also that a woman of great beauty and noble birth would ever be prized as she valued herself. So would she give herself freely, vowing that every gentle dame should give pleasure to her gallant for love's sake only, & not for greed, since all things have their price save only love.

In brief, she made love so sweetly in her day, and won such gallant lovers to herself, that when she would leave her lodging to walk abroad in the town she gave folk enough to talk about for a month on end, as much of her beauty, her fair & resplendent attire, her magnificent bearing and graceful carriage, as for the great train of courtiers, gallants and noble lords who were with her, who would follow and accompany her like so many slaves, which she endured patiently enough. And ambassadors from stranger countries, returning to their own lands, would delight ever the more to tell of the beauty and strange doings of the fair Flora than of the grandeur of the Roman republic, and most of all of her surpassing generosity—not by any means the common way of these dames; but then she was not at all of the common run, being of noble birth.

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She died at last so rich and opulent that the worth of her money, her furniture and jewels, was enough to rebuild the walls of *Rome* and free the State from debt. She made the Roman people her heir in chief, and for this reason there was built in *Rome* a magnificent temple, which after her was called the Florianum.

The first festival celebrated by the Emperor Galba was that of the amorous Flora, wherein it was permitted to the men & women of *Rome* to engage in every sort of debauchery, lecherousness, intemperance and extravagance which they could devise; to the end that she who best played the dissolute, wanton and debauched, was that day esteemed the most saintly and religious dame.

Ah, there was never a *fiscaigne* (which the loose women and Moorish slave-girls dance on Sundays in Malta, in the open squares before all the people) nor a *saraband* to touch it, for never a movement nor lascivious posture, never a wanton gesture nor strange contortion was forgotten. And the more wanton and dissolute was the dance devised, the more gallant the lady was thought, since the Romans held that the more lascivious and lecherous a woman's port and gesture on approaching the temple of the goddess, the greater chance she stood of gaining the same riches, delights and wealth as Flora herself.

Of a truth a fine belief, & a fine festal celebration: for they were Pagans. Nor can we doubt that there was any sort of wantonness omitted, so long beforehand had these ladies been studying their lesson, just as those of our day will set themselves to learn a ballet, working at it heart and soul. So were the young men, & the old ones too, the more eager to watch & study their lascivious counterfeitings. If such could be represented among us, folk would soon enough prout by the same in more ways than one, & to see such a sight people would willingly be crushed to death in the crowd. Let those criticise who will; I will leave the task to any rollicking young gallant. Let him read Suetonius, the Greek of Pausanias & the Latin of Manilius, in the books they have written on these illustrious ladies, these famous amorous dames of old, and he will know all there is to be known.

This one tale more, and then an end:

We may read how the Lacedæmonians set forth on a time to besiege Messene, but the Messenians being forewarned, while some went out to meet the enemy, the others hastened away to Lacedæmon, thinking to surprise and pillage their town, while the Spartans were engaged before Messene, but they were valiantly repelled and scattered by the women who remained at home. On learning of this, the Lacedæmonians retraced their road and turned towards their own city. But from afar off they descried their women all armed, having driven off the enemy, wherefore they were in great alarm. But the women began at once to tell & recount their adventure, and thereupon both men and women set themselves joyously to kiss, fondle and embrace one another after such a fashion that, losing all shame, and lacking the patience to take off their armour, they fell to the bout bravely, in the very place where they had met. Thereafter strange sights might have been seen, & men might have heard a pleasing chink and clatter of armour. In memory of this they had built a temple and a statue to the goddess Venus, which they named the Armed Venus, unlike all other images, which all do shew her naked. 'Twas indeed a gay encounter, and a fair thought to represent Venus armed, and call her so!

Among men of arms it is no rare sight, especially at the sacking of towns, to see soldiers fully armed having ado with women, having neither time nor patience to disarm before assuaging their desire and appetite, so full of lust are they: but 'tis an uncommon sight indeed to see an armed soldier enjoying a woman also armed. And we may well imagine this to be most pleasurable, for what greater could there be, whether for the act itself, or for the curious sight, or for the jingling of armour. It is a thing for the fancy to play around, as much for those who made love as for the spectators

¶ But enough, let us make an end: there is many another example I might have given, had I not feared to seem overbold, and to incur an odious reputation.

Yet having so lauded the beauty of women, I must needs repeat the

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words of a Spaniard who wishing ill to a certain woman, described her to me one day in these terms:

Señor, vieja es como la lampada azeytunada d'iglesia, y de hechura del armario, larga y desmayada, el color y gesto como mascara mal pintada, el talle como una campana o mola de el andar y vision d'una antigua fantasma de la noche, que tanto tuviese encontrar-la de noche, como ver una mandragora. Iesus! Iesus! Dios me libre de su mal encuentro! No se contenta de tener en su casa por huesped al provisor del obispo, ni se contenta con la demasiada conversacion del vicario ni del guardian, ni de la amistad antigua del dean, sino que agora de nuevo ha tomado al que pide para las animas del purgatorio, para acabar su negra vida. 'Sir, observe her; she is like a greasy old Church lamp. In form and shape she is like an unwieldy old cupboard badly put together; her colouring & features are like an ill-painted mask; her figure like a millstone or the bell of a monastery; her face like an ancient idol; her glance & gait like an antique ghost that walks by night, that I would as lief meet after dark as a mandrake. The good Lord preserve me from such an encounter! She is not satisfied to have the Bishop's Ordinary as a frequent guest, nor with the lengthy conversations of the Vicar, nor with the constant visits of the Dean; these do not content her, but she must needs make love to the Pardoner, who prays for poor souls in Purgatory, to crown her iniquitous life.'

See how this Spaniard, who has so fairly described the thirty beauties of women, as I have told already, can when he wills anathematize the sex with equal zeal!

THE THIRD DISCOURSE
Concerning the beauty of a Fair Limb, & the
virtue thereof

AMONG MANY FAIR BEAUTIES WHICH I HAVE heard praised at times by courtiers, as apt to provoke desire, one of the most lauded is the fair leg of a fair lady; wherein I have known many dames to take great pride, and to be at pains to tend the same, that it might retain its beauty. Among others I have heard tell of a high-born Princess of the great world, whom I knew, who loved one of her ladies far beyond all the others, and favoured her more than the rest, and all because she could draw on her mistress' hose so neatly, to fit so closely, and adjust the garter so daintily, better than any other; whence she gained much advantage and great wealth to boot. And by reason of all this care which the Princess took to keep her leg in such fair condition, we may guess that it was not at all to hide it under her petticoats, nor under skirts and robes, but to parade it at times set off with fine drawers of cloth of gold and silver, or other rich stuffs, sweetly and daintily made, which she would commonly wear. For a woman does not so delight in her body but she desires to share the sight and the pleasure with others.

Nor could this lady excuse herself by pleading that it was all to please her husband, which is the excuse of most women, and even the old ones, when they deck themselves out so gorgeously, although advanced in years; for she was a widow. True enough it is that in her husband's time she did likewise, but having lost him she would not leave off the habit.

I have known many fair and honest ladies, both wife and maiden, who are no less diligent in the right careful tending of their fair limbs: wherein they are right enough, for after this wise is more wantonness engendered than is commonly thought.

I have heard tell of a very great lady in the time of King Francis, of great beauty, who having broken her leg and had it set, found that all had not gone well, for it was set crooked. But of such courage was she that she made the bone-setter break it once more, to set it straight as it had been, and as fine and upright as ever. Whereat a certain lady was not a little amazed; but another who was both fair and wise made answer

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to her: Ah! I see you do not know what amorous virtue a fine leg bears.

I knew of old a very fair and honest damsel of the great world who was madly in love with a great lord, and who being unable to captivate him or bewitch him by whatever device, and seeing him approach one day in one of the avenues of the park, she made as though her garter were coming down, and drawing a little aside, she lifted up her leg and began to pull up her stocking and tighten her garter. The great lord observed it closely, and saw that her leg was very beautiful, losing his head so far that the lady's leg moved him more than ever her fair face had done, for he divined that two such fine columns must needs sustain a fine building; which he afterwards declared to his mistress, who could then do with him what she would. A pretty device and fashion of love!

I have likewise heard speak of a fair and honest lady, witty and of a merry humour, who one day when her chamber valet was drawing on her stockings, asked him whether he was not put in heat, desire & temptation thereby; but she said the word plainly and right out. The valet, thinking to please, and for the respect which he bore her, replied 'No'; whereupon she lifted her hand on a sudden and gave him a sound box on the ear. 'Off with you, you shall serve me no more. You are a great fool, and I shall discharge you at once.'

There are many young damsels' valets nowadays who are not so continent at the rising of their mistresses, in dressing them and putting on their shoes and stockings: there are also many gentlemen who would not have behaved so, in face of such allurements.

It is not in our day alone that the beauty of fair legs & pretty feet (for it is the same thing) has been commended; but in the time of the Romans we may read how Lucius Vitellius, father of the Emperor Vitellius, being infatuated with Messalina and desiring to stand well with her husband by her aid, prayed her one day to do him the honour of granting him a boon. 'What boon?' the Empress asked him. 'Madam, it is this,' said he, 'that it may please you one day to allow me to take off your shoes.' Messalina, who was all courtesy towards her subjects, could not refuse him

this favour, and he, having removed her shoes, kept one of them and would forever carry it about with him between his shirt and his skin, kissing it over and over, adoring by means of the slipper his lady's pretty feet, since he could not have at his will the foot itself nor the beautiful leg.

Again, there is the English Lord in the *Cent Nouvelles* of the Queen of Navarre, who in like wise bore the rich-embroidered glove of his mistress at his side. I have known many gentlemen who before donning their silken hose, would beseech their fair ladies and mistresses to try them on and wear them first for a week or ten days, and afterwards they would wear them with honour and reverence, and great content of mind and body.

I once knew a Lord of the great world, who being at sea with a very great lady, & one of the fairest in the world (who was journeying towards her own country, & had her women all ill of seasickness & in sore plight for serving her) had the pleasure of attending on her at her rising and retiring. But in dressing her and putting her to bed, and putting on and off her hose, he became enamoured of her to desperation, although she was his near kinswoman. For of a truth the temptation was too extreme, and there are none so craven of spirit as not to be moved by the same.

We read of the wife of Nero, Poppæa Sabina, the most favoured of all his wives and mistresses, that besides adorning herself profusely with all sorts of furls, ornaments, embellishments, tricks, & gewgaws, she would wear shoes and slippers of pure gold. This frippery would hardly make her conceal her foot nor her leg from Nero, her cuckold husband; nor did he alone enjoy the pleasure of the sight, but many another. And she might well adopt this as her own extravagance, since she would have the horses which drew her chariot shod with shoes of silver.

Saint Jerome censures very strongly a lady of his day who was too concerned with the beauty of her leg; in his own words: 'With her little brown boot, well-fitting and shining, she doth bewitch young men; and ensnares them with the jingle of her shoe-buckles' Doubtless this was some extravagant fashion of footgear which was in vogue at that time,

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and hardly fitting for modest women. Such boots are still worn to-day by Turkish ladies, and these among the most noble and virtuous.

I have known it discussed and questioned, whether the naked leg, or the leg covered and shod, be the more bewitching and attractive. Many declare that there is nothing like the natural, when it is well made and perfectly proportioned, according to the beauties mentioned by the Spaniard which I have cited above, and if it be white, fair and smooth, and shewn to advantage in a fine bed: for otherwise, if a lady should wish to shew the naked leg, for instance in walking, with shoes on her feet, although she were most magnificently decked out, yet would none find her fittingly or beautifully dressed, as they would one properly furnished with fair hose of coloured silk or of white thread, as they make at *Fleurance* for summer wear, which in former days I have often seen ladies wear, before the fashion for silk stockings set in which we see nowadays. Then must the hose be pulled up and stretched tight as a drum, and fastened with clasps or otherwise, according to the preference and humour of the lady: and after the foot must be shod with a trim little white shoe, or a slipper of velvet, in black or some other colour, or else a pretty little high-heeled shoe, beautifully made, as I have seen worn by a very noble lady of the great world, of the finest and daintiest sort.

And here again the beauty of the foot must be examined; for if it is too large, it is not pretty, but if on the other hand it is too small, then it gives an undesirable hint & notion of the lady—an unpleasant idea. But it should rather be middle-sized, as I have seen many which have been tempting indeed, and the more when their owners would make them peep out half-way beneath the petticoat, making them move and frisk in little turns & wanton movements, being covered with a pretty little high-heeled shoe thinly soled, or else a fair white slipper with a pointed and not a square toe; but white is the finest of all. But these little high-heeled shoes and slippers are for tall, well-built women, not for little shrimps and dwarfs, who wear their great horseshoes with soles two feet thick, & one would as soon see these walking as a giant's club or a fool's hobby-horse.

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¶ Of another thing likewise should a woman beware, which is of disguising her sex and dressing up as a boy, whether for a masquerade or other entertainment; for though she have the finest leg in the whole world, it will shew all out of place, since all things have their season and fitness; hence in counterfeiting the other sex they distort their beauty and natural grace.

Wherefore it is not becoming for a woman to dress as a boy in order to display her beauty the more, unless she will merely titivate herself with a gay little cap adorned with the Guelph or Ghibelline feather, or pulled well over the brow, so that it can be positively neither male nor female, after the fashion which our ladies adopted a little while back. Nor yet does this suit everyone, for it needs a saucy face of the right shade of expression, as with Queen Margaret of Navarre, whom it so well suited that to see her so tricked out no man could tell to which sex she really belonged, whether she was a handsome boy, or the beautiful woman she was in reality.

Whereto I am put in mind of a lady of the great world, whom I knew, who being fain to imitate this fashion, at the age of twenty-five, over tall and broad of build, and altogether masculine-looking, and being newly arrived at Court, thought to play the gallant dame, & appeared so attired one day in the ballroom, not without much staring & ridicule. The King himself gave his opinion on it, for he was one of the readiest of wit in the kingdom, declaring that she looked just like a circus woman, or better still, one of those painted figures of women that are brought from Flanders & set up before the chimney-pieces at inns & taverns with German flutes in their mouths; and indeed if she appeared again in that costume & habit, he would order her to bring her flute to serenade the noble company for their diversion. In this wise he mocked her, as well for a dislike he had taken to her husband as because the head-dress suited her ill.

Herein we may see that such disguises suit not all alike; for when the Queen of Navarre, the fairest woman in all the world, wished to adopt more of a disguise than the cap alone, she never appeared as beautiful as

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in truth she was, nor could she have, for indeed what form could she have taken more beautiful than her own, since of the fairest in all the world she could neither take nor borrow one tittle? And if she was fain to shew her leg, which I have heard certain of her women declare to be the fairest and most finely shaped in the world, otherwise than naked, or else becomingly stockinged and shod beneath her fair attire, none would have thought it so handsome as it was. Thus with due regard for fitness should fair ladies display their beauties.

¶ I have read in a Spanish book entitled *El Viago del Principe*, or the Prince's Voyage, which was that made by the King of Spain in the Low Countries, in the time of the Emperor Charles his father, that among the magnificent receptions which he met with among his rich & wealthy cities, there was one in chief given by the Queen of Hungary in the fair city of *Bams*, whence a proverb arose: *Mas brava que las fiestas de Bams*—finer than the feast of *Bains*

Among other fine entertainments was one in which, during the siege of a castle in a sham battle, as I have described elsewhere, she gave a banquet one day, among all others to the Emperor her brother, to Queen Eleanor her sister, the King her nephew, and to all the lords, knights, & ladies of the Court. Towards the end of the feast a lady appeared, accompanied by six Oreads in classic garb, in the costume of nymphs of the Virgin Huntress, all clad in cloth of silver and green, and a crescent on the brow set with diamonds which seemed to rival the moonlight, all carrying their bow & arrows, with rich quivers by their side, their shoes also of cloth of silver finely fitted. After this fashion they entered the hall, leading their dogs after them, and presenting to the Emperor, laying before him every sort of venison pasty, which they had taken in the chase.

After this came Pales, the goddess of Shepherds, with six meadow nymphs clad all in white and cloth of silver, with the same decorations on their heads all covered with pearls, wearing hose of the same stuff with white shoes, and bringing milk in every form, which they placed before the Emperor.

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Then for the third band followed the goddess Pomona with the Naiads or water nymphs, bearing an offering of fruit. This goddess was the daughter of Donna Beatrix Pacecho, the Countess d'Antremont, lady-in-waiting to Queen Eleanor, who was then but nine years old, but now the second wife of the Admiral de Chastillon. This maiden goddess bore with her companions every sort of fruit which was then in season, for it was in summer, the finest & most delicious, & presented these to the Emperor with a speech so eloquent, so fine & pronounced so sweetly, that she won the praise and admiration of the Emperor and the whole assembly, in especial considering her youth, so that all foretold that she would become what she is today, a fair, wise, honest, virtuous, clever & witty dame.

She was likewise clad as a nymph, in cloth of silver and white, shod with the same, the head adorned with precious stones, but these were all emeralds, to represent partly the colour of the fruit which they carried; and as well as the gift of fruit, she made one to the Emperor and to the King of Spain of a branch of victory all enamelled in green, the boughs laden with large pearls and precious stones, rich to the sight and of great worth; and to Queen Eleanor a fan set with a mirror, and embellished with stones of great price.

Of a truth this Princess and Queen of Hungary shewed clearly that she was an honourable dame in all things, and that her worldly wisdom was no less than her skill in the art of war; and indeed, from all I have heard, the Emperor her brother knew no little satisfaction to have a sister so honourable and so worthy of him.

Now it may well be objected that I have made this digression in my Discourse. It is to shew that all these maidens who played the part of these characters had been chosen & selected as the very fairest among all those attending on the Queens of France and Hungary and of Madame de Lorraine, among which were Frenchwomen, Italians, Flemish, Germans and those of Lorraine, among whom was no lack of beauty, and God knows whether the Queen of Hungary had been zealous to choose the fairest and most graceful.

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Madame de Fontaine-Chalandry, who still lives, could assure us of this, for she was at that time maid of honour to Queen Eleanor, and one of the most beautiful: she was known also as the fair Torcy, and has told me much concerning this banquet. And *I* have had it as truth from both her and others that all the lords, gentlemen and knights of the Court diverted themselves in regarding & gazing on the fair legs, thighs & pretty little feet of these ladies: for garbed as nymphs, their gowns were short, revealing a very fair show, even better than their pretty faces, which could be seen every day, but not their shapely legs. Whence many courtiers became the more enamoured by the sight and display of these fine limbs, than ever of their fair faces, inasmuch as above such beautiful columns there commonly fine cornices and friezes, noble architraves, rich capitals, polished and finely carved.

Nor must I be denied another digression, saying therein what I list, since the talk is now of masques and representations. Almost at the same time that these fine festivities were held in the Low Countries, & especially at *Bains*, at the reception of the King of Spain, the state entry of King Henry was made, on his return from his province of *Piedmont* & its garrisons, into *Lyons*, which was in very truth one of the fairest and most triumphant ever seen, by all that I have heard from many honourable ladies and gentlemen of the Court who witnessed it.

Now if this masque and spectacle of Diana and her hunt at the royal festivities of the Queen of Hungary was found fair, yet another was designed at *Lyons* which was quite different and better represented; for as the King's procession marched along, going towards a great classic obelisk, on his right hand he observed a meadow by the highway, girdled with a wall a little over six feet in height, and filled up within with earth to the same height. This had been planted over with trees of moderate growth, interspersed with thick undergrowth and small shrubs, together with a great many fruit trees. And in this miniature forest appeared many little stags, fawns and roebuck, all alive, though tame ones. And anon his Majesty would hear the sound of trumpets and hunting-horns, and

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all at once in the said forest appeared Diana hunting with her companions and maidens of the forest, holding in her hand a fair Turkish bow, the quiver hanging at her side, clad in the costume of a nymph, after the fashion represented to us in antique statues and the like. Her body was attired in a doublet, with six great round flounces of black cloth of gold sown with silver stars, the sleeves & the rest of crimson satin piped with gold, tucked up to shew half the thigh, revealing the fine leg and shapely limb, with sandals in the ancient fashion also of crimson satin, covered and embroidered with pearls. Her hair was braided with great strings of rich pearls, with a wealth of precious stones and jewels of great price; and above the brow a little silver crescent, gleaming with tiny diamonds, for gold would not have looked so well, nor have so well represented the crescent moon, which is silvery and clear.

Her companions were arrayed in divers fashions, of taffetas with gold stripes both wide & narrow, all in the classic mode, as well as many other colours of ancient fashion, intermingled as much for strange effects as for gaiety of aspect. Their stockings and shoes were of satin; their heads adorned like nymphs, with pearls and precious stones.

Some held in leash hounds, greyhounds, spaniels and other dogs, with cords of white and black silk, the King's colours which he wore for love of a lady named Diana whom he adored: others would go before & make the dogs run, in full cry. Others again bore little woodendarts with gilded points and dainty little hanging tassels of black and white silk, and trumpets and hunting-horns mounted in gold and silver hanging in scarves with cords of silver thread and black silk.

But so soon as they perceived the King, a lion came out of the wood which had been tamed and trained for this long before, who threw himself at the feet of the said goddess, greeting her; who seeing him so gentle and submissive, imprisoned him with a great rope of silver and black silk, and presented him straightway to the King. Thus approaching with the lion to the wall of the meadow bordering the road, a step or so from his Majesty, she offered him this gift with a rhymed stanza such as they

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made in those days, yet not at all composed or sounding ill. And in this rhyme, which she recited with a pretty grace, in the shape of this tame and gentle lion she offered him his city of *Lyons*, all gentleness and submission, and obedient to his laws and commands.

When this was all said and done very sweetly, Diana and all her companions made him a humble reverence; and the King, having regarded them all and greeted them graciously, indicating that he had taken great pleasure in their hunting and thanking them with all his heart, departed from them and continued his procession to the city. Now observe that this fair Diana and her nymphs were the most beautiful and important women of *Lyons*, whether wives, widows, or young girls, where there be plenty such, who played their little mystery so well and charmingly that most of the Princes, lords, knights, gentlemen & courtiers were ravished at the sight. I will leave you to guess whether they had not good cause for delight.

Madame de Valentinois, known as Diane de Poitiers, the King's mistress, in whose name the chase was contrived, was no less pleased, and thought warmly all her life of this town of *Lyons*; & besides she was their neighbour, for the Duchy of Valentinois lies very close to the town.

Now while we are talking of the pleasure of seeing a beautiful leg, we may well believe, as I have heard tell, that not the King alone but all the gallants of the Court, took a most prodigious pleasure in contemplating and admiring those of the fair nymphs with their short skirts and gay raiment, which gave as much or more temptation to ascend to the second storey as reason for admiration and praise of so sweet a device.

¶ But now to quit our digression and return to the point, I must tell how at Court we have seen some delightful ballets played by our Queens, and in especial by the Queen Mother; yet we courtiers would commonly cast our eyes only on the feet and legs of the ladies taking part, and take the greatest pleasure in watching the dainty play of their legs, twinkling and frisking their little feet more bewitchingly than anything in the world; for their petticoats and robes were much shorter than usual, though not

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so short as those of the nymphs, nor so high as some would have liked. Nevertheless our eyes were always lowered a little, and most of all when they danced the quick step, which in making the skirts fly out would always reveal something pleasant to see—whereat I have seen many to lose their heads with delight.

The fair ladies of *Sienna*, when the revolt of their city and republic began, formed three companies of the fairest and noblest dames in the town. Each company was a thousand strong, making three thousand in all: one was attired in violet taffetas, one in white, & one in red, all being clad as nymphs with very short skirts, so as to shew to the full the fair leg and thigh. So did they make their demonstration before all the town, as well as before the Cardinal of Ferrara and M. de Termes, Lieutenants General of King Henry, all firmly set and resolved to die for the Republic and for France, and all ready to lend a hand in the work of fortifying the city. Each one carried a fascine on the shoulder; and roused by their bravery the admiration of all. I have told this tale elsewhere, in speaking of the gallantry of women, for it is one of the finest examples of gallant dames.

For the nonce I will content me in saying that I have heard it recounted by many gentlemen and soldiers, both French and foreign, and in especial by natives of that town, that no fairer sight was ever seen in the whole world, since they were all great ladies, and the chief citizens of that town, and each fairer than the last, for everyone knows there is no lack of beauty in the city, but on the contrary it is very common. But however sweet it was to gaze on their fair faces, it must have been by so much the finer to see and contemplate their handsome thighs and fine legs, in pretty hose drawn tight, as they so well know how. Moreover their robes were all very short, after the fashion of nymphs, the easier to march; a sight which would tempt & allure the coldest & most spiritless; and what most delighted the spectators was that these fair faces might be seen any day, but not so their fine and shapely legs. Of a truth he was a wise fellow who devised this costume of the nymphs, for it affords many

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a pretty sight to be ogled, since the skirts are short, and can be slit up the side, as we see represented in many of the fair remains of ancient *Rome*, which teases the wanton eye the more.

And in our own time, what is it renders so alluring the fair dames and and maids of *Chios*? Certes they are fair and beautiful enough, but it is above all their magnificent fashions of dress, and their short skirts, which shew to the full their lovely legs and thighs and their daintily shod feet.

Whereto I remember how once at Court, a fair and well-built dame, gazing on a fine magnificent piece of tapestry, where Diana and her virgin huntresses were quaintly represented, their short skirts shewing their pretty feet and fair legs, said to one of her companions, a tiny creature, who was likewise diverted by studying this tapestry: Aha! little one, if we were all to dress after this fashion, you would be in a sad plight and lose all your advantage, for your great high-heeled shoes would betray you; nor would you ever have such grace in your walk, nor in shewing your leg, as we who are tall and stately; wherefore you would have to conceal yourself & never appear. Be thankful then that you live in these days when long gowns are the fashion, which favour you and cover up your legs so becomingly, for with your great high heels a foot high, they are more like a club than a woman's leg. For if a man had nothing to fight with, he need only to cut off one of your legs and grasp it by the shoe, and he would have a fine weapon for a fight.

And indeed there was much in what this lady said, for the fairest leg in the world, if it be encased in these great high-heeled shoes, will lose all its beauty when deformed by this ugly club foot; for if the leg be not set off by a pretty foot daintily shod, it is of no use at all. Wherefore these dames who wear such great clumping high heels think to beautify themselves and add to their height, but on the contrary they rob the leg and thigh of their beauty, which are full as fair again as the counterfeiting of a tall figure.

Likewise in times past, the pretty foot carried such wanton charm, that many chaste & prudish Roman dames (or such as affected to be so),

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and even nowadays some in Italy who follow the old tradition, would make as much ado about shewing it to the world as their faces, & would conceal it under their loose gowns as much as possible, conducting themselves in walking with such prudery and discretion that it could never be seen beyond their skirts.

This is all very well for those who are brought up to prudishness or the appearance of prudishness, & who would tempt none; we must give them their due. But methinks, had they their liberty, they would shew not only the foot and the leg, but other things as well. Nor do they hesitate to shew these to their husbands, for all their hypocrisy and scruples as being dames of position. However, I relate no more than the truth.

A certain gentleman of my acquaintance, a gallant and honourable man, having seen at *Rheims* at the Consecration of the late King, the fair leg, encased in a white silk stocking, of a noble & beautiful lady, a stately widow, from below the scaffolds which they erect for ladies to see the ceremony from, fell so madly in love with her that presently he became desperate, and what the lady's fair face failed to accomplish, her shapely leg effected; although indeed the beauty of all her person was enough to make a man die for love of her. And many another have I known of this humour.

However that may be, I will declare as my last word (which I have known to be held as a maxim by many a gallant courtier and comrade of mine) that the parade of a fine leg and a pretty foot is most perilously apt to enslave wanton eyes to love; and I marvel that some of our fine writers, whether poets or others, have not written its praises, as they have done of other parts of a fair lady's body. For myself, I would have written more thereon, did I not fear that in eulogizing these parts too much, I should be censured for heeding the rest too little. Moreover I must needs write upon other matters, without too long lingering over one.

Wherefore I will close this Discourse with one little word more: 'For God's sake, ladies, make not such ado to appear taller than you are; but concern yourselves rather with the beauty of your limbs, which some of

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you at least have so fair, though you would mar their beauty with high-heeled boots & huge horse-shoes. Useful they may be, certes, but wearing the same out of all proportion you disgust the world more than you think.

Under this head he may praise who will the other beauties of woman, as many of our poets have done; but to my mind, a fair leg, a shapely thigh and a pretty foot, have no little power and dominion in the Empire of Love.

THE FOURTH DISCOURSE

*Of the Loves of Elder Ladies, and how they are as eager in
Love as the Young*

AS I HAVE SPOKEN EARLIER OF ELDER LADIES who thirst after wanton sports, I have set myself to write a Discourse thereon. Wherefore at the outset I must tell how one day when I was at the Court of Spain, & talking with a fair and honest lady, albeit a little gone in years, she gave me this counsel: *Que ningunas damas lindas, o alo menos pocas, se hazen viejas de la cinta hasta abaxo*, that no fair ladies, or at least very few, grow old from the waist downwards. And upon my asking her as to the meaning, whether beauty of form from the waist downwards lessened not with age; or whether concupiscent desire and appetite did not die down nor grow cold in these parts, she replied that she meant both the one & the other, 'for,' said she, 'the prickings of the flesh can be cured by death alone (though it might seem that with age they would lose their savour), inasmuch as every fair woman dearly cherishes her own person, not for her own sake, but for that of another, unlike Narcissus, who, poor fool, loved himself and was his own lover, misliking all other loves.'

Nor is any fair lady of this humour; whereto I have heard tell of a very fair dame, who for love of her own self delighted oftentimes and alone in going to bed stark naked, contemplating herself in divers postures, admiring herself with lascivious glances, the while execrating her ill fortune, in that she was vowed to one man alone, who was in no wise worthy of so fair a body, seeing he was her equal in naught. At last she became so enflamed by these visions and contemplations that she said farewell to her chastity and to her foolish marriage vow, and made love afresh with a new lover.

In this wise does a woman's beauty kindle her own ardour, driving her to the arms of husband or lover to assuage her desire, since one love leads to another. Moreover, being fair and sought out of one, to whose passion she does not disdain to respond, lo, she is captured, for as Lais, the famous courtesan, would affirm, every woman who opens her mouth to speak tenderly to her lover will find her heart flown and the door straightway opened of itself.

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And further, no fair and honest woman will refuse the praise rendered her; and if once she is flattered or permits her beauty, her grace and her sweet ways to be lauded, as courtiers are used to do in the first assault of love, however late the issue be delayed, we shall always carry her off in the end.

It is true, again, that any fair woman having once learned the game of love never again unlearns it, but it remains to her a sweet and joyful sport, after the same manner that a man grown used to good living is loth enough to change it; and as this benefits the health with advancing years (so say the physicians), so likewise is a woman grown older the more eager after the delights of the flesh she has been wont to enjoy; for if her upper mouth can still savour good cheer, no less can her lower, since appetite is not forgotten nor foregone by the weight of years, but sooner by some long malady or other accident, as the doctors tell us, whereby one may weary of it for a time, but anon the desire will renew itself.

It is said also that all activities decrease and diminish with age, which steals men's strength to excel in these, save only that of Venus, which is practised luxuriously, without pain or labour, at ease in a fair soft bed. Herein I speak of the woman & not of the man, whose share is all labour and exertion, and who, denied this pleasure, will early abstain from it, though it may be in his own despite. But a woman of whatever age will receive, like a furnace, all that comes her way, if so be they are willing to give it her, and in truth there is no mount so old but she can find some rider, good or ill, to bestride her if she so desires, and even though she be so gone in years that she can no longer ride well or carry herself so finely as in her younger days, she may find money and means to get fair enough horsemen at market price, as I have heard tell. All stuffs which cost dear are vexing to the purse—though Heliogabalus on the contrary declares that the more he paid for his viands the better he found them—except the merchandise of Venus, which the dearer it is, the more pleasing, by reason of men's great desire to get good value for their money. So may the one talent return three or even a hundredfold, according to one's capacity.

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So said a Spanish courtesan to two brave gentlemen who had picked a quarrel about her, and leaving her house seized their swords and set to fighting: she put her head out of the window & cried: *Señores, mis amores se ganan con oro y plata, non con hierro*; Gentlemen, my love is won with gold and silver, not with steel.

Herein we see that all love fairly purchased is good, as many dames & cavaliers who have trafficked in these markets could assure us. But to cite examples of ladies who have burned as hot in ardour in old age as in their youth, & put out, or perhaps better, kept up their fires with second husbands and new gallants, I have now no need, having already given many such. Yet I will give one or two here also, for the exigencies of the subject.

I have heard tell of a great lady, as much discussed as any lady of her time, who seeing one day a young gallant with very white hands, she asked him what he did to keep them so. He replied as a jest, laughing, that as often as possible he rubbed them with sperm. 'Alas, then,' said she, 'it is my misfortune, for I have been bathing my affair (naming it right out) with it for over sixty years, & it is as black as the day I began, though I do it every day.'

I have heard speak of a lady well advanced in years, who wishing to remarry, asked a physician's advice one day, giving as her reasons that she was very humid and full of every sort of distemper, from which she had suffered ever since she became a widow, though never in the time of her husband, inasmuch as, by the assiduous exercises in which they had indulged together, these humours were dried up and consumed. The physician, a waggish fellow enough, and ready to please her in this, advised her to marry again and banish these humours of her body in this fashion, since it was better to be dry than moist. The lady followed his advice, and found it very good, aged as she was, and this with a new husband and lover, who loved her as much for the sake of her money as for the pleasure he had of her; though faith, there be many ancient dames who give as great pleasure and delight as the youngest, and sometimes

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even greater, by reason of their knowledge of the art and fashion of love, which excites their lovers the more.

The courtesans of *Rome* and Italy when advanced in years hold this maxim, that *una galina vecchia fa miglior brodo che un' altra*, an old hen makes better broth than any other.

Horace makes mention of an old woman who when she set herself to it would so move and agitate herself that she made not only the bed but the whole house shake. Verily a gallant old lady. The Latins call such movement & agitation of the body *subare a sue*—to be in heat like a sow.

We read of the Emperor Caligula that of all his women he loved best Cæsonia, not so much for her beauty or her youthful prime, for she was already well on in years, but because of her great wantonness & lechery, and her industry in the practice thereof, which age and long experience had taught her, surpassing all other women, though fairer and younger than she. It was his custom to take her with him to the wats, attired and armed as a boy, and riding by his side, and often he would go so far as to shew her naked to his friends, and let them observe her tricks of suppleness and her wanton ways.

We must admit then that age had not diminished this lady's beauty and lechery, since he loved her so. Nevertheless, for all the deep love he bore her, often when he would embrace her and kissed her fair throat, he could not help saying, bloodthirsty wretch, 'Marry, a beautiful neck, but I can have it cut when I will.' Alas! the poor woman was slain with him, by a sword-thrust through the body by a Centurion, and her daughter broken to death against a wall, which could not have been but for the villainy of her father.

Again, we may read of Julia, step-mother of the Emperor Caracalla, that being one day half-naked, as it were by accident, and Caracalla seeing her, he said, 'Ha! I should like it well enough, if I were allowed.' She replied at once: 'So please you, are you not the Emperor, who makes laws instead of obeying them?' For these prompt words and apt inclination he married her and coupled with her.

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An almost similar reply was given to one of our last three monarchs, whom I will not name. Being captivated and in love with a very fair and honest lady, & having made the first advances of love, he one day made known to her his pleasure more at length, by an honourable and discreet gentleman whom I know, who on delivering the little missive, used all his persuasion to gain her consent. But she being by no means a fool, excused herself as well as she could, with many excellent reasons finely marshalled together, and not forgetting the great, or perhaps better, the small point of honour. Finally the gentleman, after much argument, asked her in conclusion what she desired him to tell the King. She thought for a moment, and then suddenly turned round and cried: 'What are you to tell him? Why! what else, save that I am well enough aware that no refusal made to a King and Sovereign ever profited any man or woman, who will often use his power to take and command rather than to beg & supplicate.' The gentleman, satisfied with this reply, carried it straightway to the King, who taking time by the forelock, sought out the lady in her chamber, and she without overmuch resistance gave way. This response was at once full of wit, & the lady's desire to please her King. Though folk declare 'tis not good to sport or have ado with the King, yet should this sport be excepted, whence no harm comes, so only the lady be discreet and constant.

To return to Julia, the stepmother of the Emperor, she must needs have been a very whore, to love and take as husband him who had some while before slain upon her breast her own son; a whore indeed, and of a base heart. All the same it is a great thing to be Empress, and much can be forgotten for such an honour. This Julia was dearly loved of her husband, although she was well on in years; yet she had lost naught of her beauty, being very fair & ready of wit, as those words may witness which raised the stature of her greatness.

Filippo Maria, the third Duke of Milan, took as second wife Beatrix, widow of the late Facino Cane, who was then an old woman; but she brought him as marriage portion four hundred thousand crowns, apart

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from furniture, rings and jewellery, which were of great price, and made amends for her age. Notwithstanding which, she was suspected by her husband of playing the wanton with others, and for this he caused her death. We may see how little old age impairs the taste for games of love, and only suppose that the dame's long practice had but enflamed her desires.

Constance, Queen of Sicily, who from her youth and all her life long had been a vestal virgin, never leaving the chastity of the cloister-cell, gaining her freedom to enter the world at the age of fifty, desired (though she was by no means fair and quite decrepit) to taste the pleasure of the flesh & to marry; she conceived a child at the age of fifty-two, of which she wished to be delivered publicly in the meadows of *Palerino*, wherefore she had a tent or a pavilion set up on purpose, that folk might have no doubt that it was verily the fruit of her body, which was one of the greatest miracles ever seen since Saint Elizabeth's time. The *History of Naples*, however, declares that it was reputed to be a supposititious child. But whether or no, he grew up a great man; though indeed the greater number of brave men are bastards, as a nobleman once said to me.

I knew of old an Abbess of *Tarascon*, the sister of Madame d'Usez, of the house of Tallard, who doffed her nun's garb & left her convent when she was over fifty, and married the great Chanay who was so well-known at Court.

Many another nun has played such tricks, whether in wedlock or otherwise, in her ripe age to taste of the joys of the flesh. And if these do so, what then can our ladies of the great world do, who are accustomed to them from their tenderest years? Shall old age hinder them from tasting a pretty morsel now & again, as they have so long been wont to do? Else what would happen to all these good restoratives & skilfully compounded broths, all the ambergris, the rescaldatives & comfortable drugs to warm the stomach grown old and chilly? For we cannot doubt that these concoctions, which strengthen and recreate their feeble stomachs, do secretly perform another function, in warming their bodies and restoring some

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ardent heat, which must anon be expressed by cohabitation and copulation, which is the most sovereign remedy there is, and the most often resorted to—without consulting the physicians, to whose opinion on the matter I must defer.

And herein is the best of all for these ladies: for being gone in age and nigh to their fiftieth year, they need have no fear of becoming pregnant, & so have the fullest freedom & liberty to enjoy all the arrears of pleasure, which it may be some have not dared to take lest their belly should betray them, inasmuch as many give way to the sports of love more freely after fifty than before. I have heard tell of not a few ladies of high and of the greatest rank who were of this humour, and indeed I have known and heard speak of many who often wished their fifty years upon them, that they might not conceive, but have their pleasure without fear of scandal. And why indeed should they refrain in old age? For it might be said of some women that even after death they feel some movement & picking of the flesh. So I am come to another tale which I must tell.

I had in old days a younger brother called Captain Bourdelle, one of the bravest and most valiant captains of his time. This I must needs say of him, although he was my brother, without going too far in my praise of him; as many combats he fought both in battle and in the lists bear witness, for of all the gentlemen of France he had the greatest skill with arms; hence in *Piedmont* he was known as one of the Rodomonts. He was killed at the assault of *Hedin* when it was last retaken.

He was intended for the profession of letters by his parents, so at the age of eighteen he was sent into Italy to study. He remained at *Ferrara*, since Madame Renée de France, the Duchess of Ferrara, was deeply attached to my mother, and kept him in that city to pursue his studies at the University there. However, since he was neither born nor fitted for such a life, he studied but little, but occupied himself rather with love & wooing. Whereto he became deeply enamoured with a certain French lady, a widow, who was in the suite of the Duchess, known as *Mademoiselle de La Roche* (or *de La Mothe*), & had great joy of her, for each

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was desperately in love with the other, until my brother, being recalled by my father, who saw he was little suited for letters, was obliged to return home.

The lady who loved him, in great fear that ill might betide, for she was of Luther's opinion, then much in vogue, begged my brother to take her with him to France, to the Court of Queen Margaret of Navarre, in whose suite she had been until she was given to Madame Renée on her marriage & departure for Italy. My brother, who was young & thoughtless, was glad enough of her pleasant company, and took her to *Paris*, where the Queen was, who had great pleasure in seeing her again, for she was one of the wittiest of women and the most ready of speech, being a fair widow to boot and accomplished in all things.

My brother having stayed some days with my grandmother and my mother, who were then at Court, anon returned home to see his father. After a while, wearying of the profession of letters, and seeing himself unfitted for it, he suddenly left it and took himself off to the wars in *Piedmont* and *Parma*, where he won great glory. He served for the space of five or six months without returning home, after which he went to see his mother, who was then at Court with the Queen of Navarre at *Pau*, to whom my brother made reverence as she was returning from Vespers. As befitted one of the most gracious Princesses in the world, she received him well, and taking him by the hand, walked up and down with him in front of the Church for an hour or two, asking news of the wars in *Piedmont* and Italy and of other matters, to all of which my brother gave such fair answers that she was as well satisfied (for he was apt of speech) with his wit as with his person, for he was a finely-made man of the age of twenty-four. At last, having talked with him for a long while, for it was the nature and complexion of the Princess never to disdain good talk and the conversation of honourable men, passing from one subject to another the while they walked together, she quietly stopped my brother right upon the tomb of Mademoiselle de La Roche, who had died some three months before; then taking him by the hand she said: 'Cousin, (for so

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she called him, since a daughter of Albiet had married into our house of Bourdeille; though for all that I make no ado about it, but keep a tight rein on ambition), do you feel no movement below you and under your feet?' 'Why no, Madame,' he made answer. 'Ah, think again, Cousin,' said she. My brother replied: 'Madame, I have carefully heeded, but I feel no movement, since I tread on solid stone.' 'Well, you must know,' went on the Queen, keeping him in suspense no longer, 'that you are standing upon the tomb & the body of poor Mademoiselle de La Roche, whom you once loved so dearly, and who is now buried below. Since our souls possess feeling after death, how can we doubt but that this fair lady, so lately dead, should feel moved so soon as you walked on her tomb? And if you felt nothing, by reason of the solid stone, doubt not that for this she was the more moved and troubled. And inasmuch as it is a pious office to hold the dead in memory, and the more those whom we have loved, I pray you, give her a *Pater noster* and an *Ave Maria*, and a *De Profundis* also, and sprinkle her tomb with holy water; whereto you shall win the name of a faithful lover and a good Christian. To this I will now leave you,' and so she went away. My brother (since dead) did not fail to do as she had said, and after went to find her, whereupon she rallied him a little, for she was ready and skilled in speech and all the graces of conversation.

Such were the beliefs of the Princess, though rather (I divine) by graceful sentiment and quaint conceit than by faith.

Her gentle words recall to my mind the epitaph of a courtesan who was buried at *Notre-Dame de Populo*, which reads thus: *Quæso, viator, ne me diutius calcatam amplius calces*; Stranger, who spurned and disdained me so oft in life, spurn me now no more. But the Latin has the better grace.

And now, to make an end, there is no need to wonder that the Spanish dame held her maxim to be true of all fair ladies who have been madly loved, and who have loved, and love themselves, and delight in the praise of men, for all that their beauty is almost past. And it is ever the greatest

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pleasure you can give them, and which they love the best, to tell them they are the same as ever, and in no wise changed or grown old, and above all those who age not from the waist downwards.

I have heard speak of a very fair and honest lady who said one day to her lover: 'I know not whether the future will bring me increasing feebleness of age (for she was then fifty-five years old), but thank God, I have never done better than I do now, nor taken greater pleasure in these matters. Whether or no this will endure and continue into my extreme old age, I will make no moan, nor bewail the days that are gone.'

Now concerning love and concupiscence, I have cited here and elsewhere examples enough, without dwelling further on the subject. Let us now consider the other maxim, as touching the beauty of fair ladies, that it diminishes not with age from the waist downwards.

Truly the Spanish lady put forward many fine reasons and witty comparisons, likening these fair dames to the noble old buildings of time past, which yet are beautiful in their ruin, as one may see among the proud antiquities of *Rome* the ruins of fair palaces, and the marvellous Colosseum & Thermae, which still do shew what once they were, the wonder and admiration of the world, since even their ruins strike men with astonishment and awe, and upon them men still build fair edifices, proving that the foundations are better and finer than new ones. For one may see often enough in the constructions of our architects and masons that if they should find old ruins and foundations, they will at once build on the top rather than make new ones.

Whereto I have often seen fair ships and galleys built and remodelled upon old hulls and keels, which had long lain useless in harbour, which far excelled the new ones made by the ships' carpenters from new timber fresh from the forest.

Moreover, declared this Spanish dame, do we not often see the summits of high towers blown down, gashed and disfigured by great winds, tempests and thunderstorms, while the base remains safe and sound? For it is these lofty towers which the storms beat against; likewise the sea

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winds undermine and eat away the upper stones, corroding them more than the lower ones which are not so much exposed.

In like wise, many fair ladies lose the lustre of their beauty of face by many an accident whether of cold or heat, of sun or moon, and many another; & what is worse, by the cosmetics they use, thinking to beautify themselves, though they spoil all: whereas they will fard their lower parts with naught else but the natural sperm, feeling there neither cold nor rain, neither wind, sun nor moon, which touch these parts not at all.

If they are incommoded by the heat, they know well how to gain relief and coolness; likewise they can guard against cold. For there is many an inconvenience and trouble to be kept from the beauty of a woman's face, but few from which to guard the lower parts. Wherefore on seeing a fair woman whose face has lost its beauty, we must not presume that the lower parts are likewise, where there is naught fine and fair, and no handsome foundation.

I have heard tell of a certain great lady, very fair and devoted to the sports of love: one of her old lovers having lost sight of her for a space of four years, by reason of some journey on which he had gone, he found many changes in that fair face which he had known aforetime, wherefore he became so chilled and disgusted that he had no heart to renew the attack, nor the past pleasure he had had with her. She recognized him well enough, and cast about her to find a way whereby he should come and see her in bed. To this end she one day counterfeited sickness, and upon his coming to see her, she said: 'I know very well, Sir, that you disdain me for my aging face; but wait, look you (and on the instant she uncovered the lower half of her body all naked) whether aught be changed there. Though my face have deceived you, this will deceive you not.' Whereupon the gentleman finding her as fair & dainty as ever, straightway recovered his appetite and ate of the flesh which he had thought to be unlovely and spoiled. 'And after this fashion, Sir,' said the lady, 'you men are deceived! Another time do not put such trust in our false lying faces, for our bodies do not always match them; & this I would teach you.'

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Another lady of similar sort, being sadly changed in beauty of face, was so embittered and angered against it that she would no more contemplate it in her mirror, saying that it was not worth it. So she would have her head dressed by her women, and to make amends, would gaze upon and examine only her lower parts, taking as much delight therein as she had formerly taken in her fair face.

I have heard tell of another lady who whenever she laid with her lover by day, would cover her face with a fair white kerchief of fine Holland web, for fear that seeing her face the upper part would chill him & hinder the fire of the lower battery, so that he should disdain her, for indeed below all was as fair as ever. Whereto I recall the story of a very honourable lady, who wittily countered her husband one day, upon his asking her why her hair below had not become white & hoary like that on her head: 'Ah! the villainous rogue, which has done all the mischief, and suffers none of the consequences. It affects my head and all my members, and yet all the while it remains unchanged in its first vigour, keeping the same colour, and above all the same natural heat, and the same appetite and good health. But alas, it is not so with my other members, who for its sake are full of aches and pains, nor with my hair, which has become silvered.'

And she had reason enough to speak so; for of a truth this part engenders many ills, gouts and maladies, without their gallant little affair in the middle being one whit the worse; and indeed, the doctors declare that those who are over ardent in the practice turn grey-headed all the earlier. So we may see how fair ladies never age in that part either in one fashion or another.

I have heard it told by many men experienced in these things, & who have known many courtesans, that they have hardly ever seen fair women to grow old there; for the lower part and the middle, the thighs and legs, kept all their beauty, and the suppleness and disposition of the past. And further, I have heard many a husband vow that he found his *old woman* (as he called her) as beautiful as ever in the lower regions, as eager and

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wanton and as willing as ever, and found naught changed save only the face, and loved to lie with her as much as ever in youth.

In a word, how many men there be who love to mount old women rather than young, in like manner as many love old horses best, whether for a good day's riding, or for the riding-school and for pleasure, which have been so well trained in their youth that in their old age none can find aught to complain of, so well drilled are they, nor have they lost any of their pretty tricks.

¶ I have seen in the Royal Stables a horse named Quadragant, broken in during the reign of King Henry. He was twenty-two years old & more; but for all his age he still went very well and had forgotten nothing of his training, insomuch that he gave great pleasure and delight to the King and to all who saw him go through his paces. I have seen the same in a great courser called Gonzago, from the stud-farm of *Mantua*, which was a contemporary of Quadragant.

I have also seen that superb black which did stallion's duty: Signor Antonio, who was in charge of the Royal Stud, shewed me him one day when I was passing through *Meung*, making him do two strides and a leap, and also the round step, which he performed as well as when M. de Carnavellet had first trained him (whose horse he was). The late M. de Longueville desired to hire him for the price of three thousand livres, but King Charles would not allow it, but took him for himself, recompensing the owner otherwise. I could name a host of others, but I should never be done, so I will call as witness those gallant squires who have so often seen the like.

Our late King Henry, at the camp of *Amiens*, chose for the day of battle a horse named *Le Bay de la Paix* (the bay horse Peace), a fine strong charger, but old. He died of fever in the camp at *Amiens*, which was thought a very strange affair by the expert farriers.

The late Duc de Guise sent to his stud farm of *Esclairon* for the bay Sanson, which was kept there as stallion, as his mount at the battle of *Dreux*, where he went very well.

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In his first wars the late Prince took twenty-two horses from the stud at *Meung*, where they had served as stallions, for use in the wars; and divided them among the nobles who were with him, having first reserved his share. Of these the brave *Avaret* had a charge which the Grand Constable had given to King Henry, which was named *Old Gossip*. Old as he was, a better had never been seen; his master proved him in many a tough fight, and well he served him. Captain *Bouidet* was given the Arab, mounted on which the late King Henry was wounded and killed, which had been a gift to him from *M. de Savoie*. He was named *Unlucky* when he was presented to the King, which proved an ill omen. He was never so good in youth as in his old age, and his master, one of the most gallant gentlemen of France, would always display his best points. In fine, not one of all these stallions was debarred by age from giving good service to his master, his Prince, and his country. Indeed, there be many old horses who never give up, hence the saying that no good horse ever becomes a hack.

After this fashion there be many ladies, who in their old age are full as good as others in their youth, & give as great pleasure, having been well taught and trained in their time, which teaching they do not easily forget. And the best of it is that these are always the most free and generous in giving to their riders and cavaliers, who demand more money and higher payment for riding an old mount than a young, contrary to the practice of squires, who care less for a well-trained mount than one that is young and unbroken, which is perhaps reasonable.

¶ I have known it to be questioned, on the subject of elder ladies, whether there is greater glory in debauching a woman of advanced years, & enjoying her, or a young one; and many a one have I heard declare for the elder, saying that the ardour and heat of youth are already debauched and easy to lead astray, whereas the prudence and chilled blood of age can only with difficulty be seduced, and therefore those who accomplish this should win the greater reputation.

Whereto the famous courtesan *Laïs* was used to vaunt and glory in the

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fact that the philosophers would so often come to see her and learn in her school, more than in all the foolish young gallants who visited her. Flora likewise took pride in seeing at her door the great Senators of *Rome*, rather than the young fops and dandies. Hence to my mind there is great glory in overcoming the prudence of elder persons, in order to take pleasure and delight with them.

But I would refer me to those who have experimented in this wise, whereof some have told me that a trained mount is pleasanter than one fierce & unbroken who knows not so much as the trot. Moreover, what pleasure and great delight can a man have in mind, when he sees enter a ballroom, or one of the Queen's chambers, or a church, or other great assembly, an elderly dame of great dignity, *de alta guisa* (of stately carriage) as they say in Italian, or perhaps a lady of honour to the Queen or to some Princess, or the governess of the King's daughter, or of a young Queen or great Princess, or may be of the young maids of honour, who has been selected for this high office by reason of her dignity. There she will be, with the mien of the prude, of the chaste and virtuous lady, and so believed by all the world, by reason of her age: then a man may think to himself, or may be say to some faithful comrade and confidant of his: 'There she goes with her grave airs, her staid, disdainful, frigid looks, as though she were cold as a stone! Yet marry, when I have her laid in bed, never a weathercock in all the world which moves and shifts so fast and nimbly as do her thighs and haunches.'

For myself, I do believe that he who has experience & can tell, knows great content of heart. Ah, how many ladies have I known who would feign to be modest, prudent and censorious, yet none so lecherous and wanton when they came to it, and would yield far oftener than younger women, who by reason of their own lack of adroitness fear the struggle! It is likewise said that there is nothing like old vixens for hunting and finding food for their young.

We read how of old many of the Roman Emperors delighted in debauching and possessing great ladies of honour and repute, as well for

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the pleasure and satisfaction, which assuredly is greater than with their inferiours, as for the honour and glory which should acruë in so debauching and bestirding them: so in like manner have I known in my time many a great lord, Prince and noble, who have vaunted themselves with great content of heart for having done the like.

Julius Cæsar and Octavius, his successor, were passing ardent in these conquests, as I have told aforetime; and after them Calligula, who bidding to his feasts the most illustrious Roman ladies with their husbands, would fixedly contemplate and examine them, and would even raise up their faces with his hand, if some for shame would hide them, as becoming ladies of honour and repute; others maybe would feign the airs of prudery and chastity, though verily there could have been few indeed of these in the time of these debauched Emperors. But they must needs counterfeit the same, for greater pleasure in the game, as I have seen many ladies to do. And afterwards those who had pleased the excellent Emperor he would lead away, even from their husbands' side, & taking them from the hall into a chamber apart, he would take his fill of pleasure of them, & presently would bring them back to sit down once more, and before all the assembly he would praise their hidden beauties and particular charms, specifying them all by name. And those who bore some blemish, ugliness or defect, he would by no means spare, but would describe and declare all in public, with no disguise or concealment.

Nero did that which was even worse, being so curious as to gaze upon his mother's dead body, studying it all over & handling the limbs, praising some and disparaging others.

I have heard tell of the like in Christian times, of certain great lords who felt this same curiosity towards their dead mothers.

Nor was this the end with Calligula, for he was used to describe their movements, their lascivious and wanton ways in doing the thing, and above all of those who were discreet & modest, or who counterfeited the same at table. For once a-bed, if they desired to do the same, assuredly the cruel tyrant would threaten them with death if they did not perform

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all his will to content him, which for very fear they did. But afterwards he would shame them as he pleased, to the scorn and general mockery of the poor ladies, who thinking to be held chaste and virtuous as woman may be, and to play the hypocrite and feign the *donne da ben* (modest woman) were suddenly revealed & reputed strumpets & wantons, which was perhaps no bad method of disclosing them in a character in which they had no wish to be known. And what was even better, as I have said, it was always great ladies, such as wives of consuls, dictators, prætors, quæstors, senators, censors; knights and others of the greatest estate and dignity, inasmuch as we might compare them to-day in Christendom to Queens, which are to be likened to the wives of consuls, since these had command over all; to Princesses greater and less, duchesses, marchionesses, countesses and viscountesses, baronesses and knights' ladies, and other ladies of high rank and great estate, with whom there is no doubt but that many an Emperor and King of our day would do likewise if he had but the power, as did Calligula: but they are Christians, having the fear of God before their eyes, His holy ordinances and their own conscience and honour, as well as the censure of their fellows and the ladies' husbands; for to the generous spirit all tyranny is unendurable. Wherein of a truth our Christian Kings are to be praised and commended, in that they seek to gain the love of fair ladies rather by soft speech and the arts of a lover than by force & compulsion, hence the conquest is by so much the finer.

I have heard tell of two great Princes who took much pleasure in thus discovering the beauties, charms and peculiarities of their ladies, but also their deformities, faults and blemishes, as well as their little wiles, gestures and wanton tricks, not however in public, like Calligula, but in private, among their most intimate friends. A pretty business, so to discuss the private parts of these poor ladies, who thinking but to delight their lovers are thus scorned and made a mockery.

But to return to our first comparison, that just as one sees fair buildings constructed upon better foundations and of finer stone and material,

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some than others, wherefore they will endure longer in their beauty and glory, so also there be ladies whose bodies are so well complexioned and disposed, and of such surpassing beauty that time (it would seem) gains no dominion over them as over the others, nor does it undermine their fairness at all.

We may read how Artaxerxes loved best of all the women that he had the fair Astacia, who was advanced in years, but none the less very beautiful, who had played the whore with his late brother Darius. His son fell so madly in love with her, by reason of her marvellous beauty despite her age, that he demanded of his father to share her with him as he shared his Kingdom. But the father, made jealous by this idea of sharing his precious morsel, created her Priestess of the Sun, inasmuch as women of this order in Persia must vow themselves to absolute chastity.

Again, we may read in the *History of Naples* how Ladislas, the Hungarian King of *Naples*, besieged the Duchess Marie, wife of the late Rammondello de Balzo, in *Taranto*, and after several assaults and essays took her by arrangement with her children, and married her, for all her advanced years, since she was very fair, & took her with him to *Naples*, where she was known as Queen Marie, and where he loved and cherished her very dearly.

I once saw the Duchesse de Valentinois (Diane de Poitiers) at the age of seventy, but as fair of face, as fresh and lovable as at thirty, and of a truth she was deeply loved and wooed of one of the greatest and most valiant Kings in all the world. I may reveal her age frankly without wronging her beauty, for no fair lady is loved of a great King but it is a sign that that perfection dwells in her which makes him love her; moreover, the beauty given of heaven should surely not be dealt with sparing hand to the demi-gods of earth.

I saw this lady, six months before her death, and still so fair that even the stoniest heart must have been moved, although a while before she had broken her leg on the pavement at *Orleans*, riding and sitting her horse as well and dextrously as ever; but the horse slipped and fell beneath her;

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and by reason of the broken limb, and the ills and sufferings she had endured, it seemed her fair face must have changed. But on the contrary, her beauty, her grace & dignity & fair mien were as they had ever been. And more than all, her skin was of an exceeding whiteness, which had no need of paint, though folk said that every morning she would use certain lotions composed of spring water & sundry drugs, which I am not familiar with as are skilful doctors and cunning apothecaries. I verily believe that if this lady had lived another hundred years, she would never have grown old, either in face, so fair of feature was it, or in the body which is covered and hid, so finely was it proportioned and conditioned. Pity it is that the earth should cover such beauty

I have likewise seen the Marquise de Rothelin, mother of the Dowager Princess de Condé, and the late M. de Longueville, in whom was no decay of her beauty either through time or age, but appearing as of old in the flower of her youth, save that towards the end her face became a little reddened. But her beautiful eyes, which had no rival in all the world, and which her daughter has inherited, changed not at all, but were as apt to wound the heart as ever.

Again, I have seen Madame de la Bourdesière, since married a second time and become wife to the Marechale d'Aumont, as fair in advanced years, one would have said, as ever in her early youth, so that her five fair daughters surpassed her in nothing. Indeed, a man would willingly have left them all to take the mother, had the choice been set him, and this though she had borne many children. But she would tend her beauty with great heed, and was a mortal enemy of the night dews and of moonlight, avoiding them all she could. The common practice of using paint, indulged in by many ladies, was quite unknown to her.

I have also seen (which is more marvellous still) Madame de Mareuil, mother of the Marquise de Mézières and grandmother of the Princess-Dauphin, at the age of a hundred, at which she died, as upright, fresh, active, healthy and beautiful as at the age of fifty. She had been a most beautiful woman in her first youth.

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Her daughter, the said Marquise de Mézières, was such another and died as well preserved, but she was twenty years younger, and her figure had wasted a little. She was the aunt of Madame de Bourdeille, my elder brother's wife, who had the like virtue, for although she had passed her fifty-third year and had borne fourteen children, one might verily think (and others of wiser judgment than I have seen her and assure me it is so) that the four daughters about her might be her sisters. So may we see certain winter fruits, and those of the late season, to rival those of summer itself, and keep as mellow and fine and full of flavour, or even more so.

The wife of the Admiral de Brion, and her daughter, Madame de Barbézieux, were both very handsome into their old age.

I have been told lately that the fair Paule de Toulouse, formerly of such renown, is still as beautiful as ever, although she is now eighty years old, nor is there aught changed, whether in her tall figure or her handsome face.

Another I have likewise seen is the Présidente de Conte of Bordeaux, of similar age and beauty, and still very lovable and desirable, for she was full of perfections. Many another would I name, but I must draw to a close.

A young Spanish cavalier speaking of love to a lady of advanced years, but still fair, she answered him: *A mis completas desta manera me habla V.M?* How can you speak thus to me at my complines? Meaning by complines her old age and the decline of her fair days and approach of night. The knight replied: *Sus completas valen mas, y son mas graciosas que las horas de prima de qualquier otra dama.* Your complines are more to be treasured, more fair and gracious than the hours of prime of any other lady, whoever she be. Certes a fair-spoken reply.

Another speaking also of love to an elderly dame, & she pointing out to him her decaying charms, which none the less were not too far gone, he made answer: *A las visperas se conoce la fiesta.* At vespers the feast is at its height.

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Another, Madame de Nemours, is still with us to-day, a while back in her April the beauty of the world, which still defies the onslaughts of time, though he steal all else away. I may indeed declare her (as do those who have seen her with me) to have been in her heyday the fairest woman in Christendom. I saw her dancing one day, as I have told elsewhere, with the Queen of Scots, they two alone without other ladies to companion them, and this by a caprice of theirs, that all who watched them dance knew not which to judge the fairer; for as 'twas said at the time, it was as though those two suns of which we read in Pliny had for once appeared together in the heavens, to astonish the world. Madame de Nemours, in those days Madame de Guise, had the fuller figure; & if I be permitted to say so without offence to the Queen of Scots, she had a soberer and more apparent majesty of mien, although she was not a Queen like the other. But then she was the grand-daughter of that great King (Louis XII) the father of his people, whom she resembled in several of her features, as I have seen him portrayed in the gallery of the Queen of Navarre, in which he looked every inch a King.

I believe myself to have been the first to use this name of Grand-daughter of the Father of the People, and this was at *Lyons* at the time of the King's return from Poland. Indeed I would often call her so, which name she did me the honour of approving, and desiring me to use. She was in very truth the grand-daughter of this great King, and above all in beauty and kindness of heart, for she was ever gracious, and few or none there be whom she ever hurt or displeased, while many won great favours of her in her time, which is to say the time of the late M. de Guise her husband, who enjoyed mighty repute in France. There were then two fair perfections united in this lady, goodness and beauty, which two she has fairly retained to the present time, and by means of which she won her two honourable husbands, and indeed two whose equal is rarely or never to be found. Aye marry, were another such to appear who was worthy of her, and she should desire him for the third, she might well win and take him, so fair is she even now.

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And it is very true that in Italy the dames of *Ferrara* are deemed fine and tasty morsels, whence comes the proverb, *potta ferraresa*, just as they say, *cazzo mantuano*. Whereto, when a great lord of that country was paying his court to a fair and noble French Princess, and all at Court were lauding his great virtues, his gallantry & merits, the late M. d'Au, Captain of the Scottish Guard, proved a finer shot than them all in reminding them: Nay, but you forget the best of all, his *cazzo mantuano*.

I once heard a like remark when the Duke of Mantua, who was nicknamed the *Gobin* (the Hunchback) because of this deformity, wished to espouse the sister of the Emperor Maximilian, who was told of the defect. Folk say that she only made answer: *Non importa purchè la campana habbia qualche difetto, ma ch'el sonaglio sia buono* (It matters not if the bell be faulty, so only the clapper be sound), meaning again this *cazzo mantuano*. Some declare that she never said the word at all, being too discreet and well brought up, but at all events others said it for her.

But to return to the Princess of Ferrara, I saw her at the marriage of the late M. de Joyeuse, dressed in a mantle of the Italian mode, drawn half-way up the arms in the Siennese fashion. But not a lady there could eclipse her, and none who did not say: 'This fair Princess cannot contrive greater loveliness, so lovely she is already. And it is easy to judge by this fair face that other & greater beauties are covered & hidden away from our sight, just as by observing the magnificent façade of a fine building it is easy to divine that within there be fair chambers, ante-chambers and alcoves, & fine nooks and recesses.' In many another place has she made display of her beauty, and no long time past, though in the autumn of her life, as in Spain at the marriage of Monsieur & Madame de Savoye, where admiration of her beauty and charm will remain for ever graven on the hearts of all who saw her. And if but my pen had wings swift and strong enough to raise her to the skies, I would gladly do it; but alas, it is too feeble. In very truth she was a marvellously beautiful woman in her springtime, her summer and autumn, and even now in the winter of her days, though she has borne many griefs and many children.

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The worst of it is that the Italians, despising a woman who has borne many children, give her the name of *scrofa*, which is to say a sow; but those who produce fair, brave and noble children, as did this Princess, are surely to be praised, and should be called the blest of heaven, rather than this foul name.

But I much wonder and marvel at this strange inconsistency: that the frailest and most fickle thing in the world, a fair woman, can offer such resistance to time. Such is not my own opinion, which I should be sorry to hold, since I honour the constancy of many a woman, nor are all inconsistent. It is another who holds this view.

¶ I would willingly cite the names of ladies of foreign lands, as well as our own, who were fair in their autumn and winter, but at this point I will put forward but two.

One, Queen Elizabeth of England, who reigns to-day, is still as fair as ever, so I have been told; and if she be such, I believe her to be a princess of great beauty, for I saw her in her summer and autumn seasons. But she is now close upon winter, if she be not already there, for it is long since I saw her; and when I first saw her, I knew what age she was reputed to be. I believe that what has sustained her so long at her beauty's height is that she has never married nor borne the estate of marriage, which is in truth burdensome, & the more when a woman has many children. This Queen might be praised on all hands, were it not for the death of the fair, brave and gallant Queen of Scots, which has indeed tarnished her good name.

The other foreign princess is the Marquise de Goast, Donna Maria d'Arragon, whom I observed to be a very fair lady even in her later years, as I shall tell you in a narrative which I will make the briefest I can.

After King Henry died, & Pope Paul IV a month later, it was necessary that all the cardinals should assemble for the election of a new Pope. Among others there came from France the Cardinal de Guise, who went to *Rome* by sea with the King's galleys, the General of which was the Grand Prior of France, brother of the said Cardinal, who like a good brother conveyed him thither with sixteen galleys. They made such fair

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speed and had so good a wind astern, that they arrived in two days and two nights at *Civita Vecchia*, and so from there to *Rome*, where the Grand Prior seeing that none were yet ready to proceed with the election (and indeed it was still three months off) and that his brother's return would be delayed, and his galleys lay idle in port, he resolved to go on to *Naples* to see the town and spend his time there.

On his arrival there the Viceroy, at that time the Duke of Alcala, received him as though he had been a king. And before his arrival he saluted the town with a fine long salvo of artillery, the same compliment being paid him by the town and the forts, so that you would have thought the very heavens were loud with thunder. Then holding his galleys in line of battle & review order, still out at sea, he sent in a skiff M. de l'Estrange, of Languedoc, as emissary to the Viceroy, a gentleman of honour and diplomacy, with a gift of graceful speech, that he might not be alarmed, and to ask his permission (since, although we were at peace, we came in warlike guise) to enter the harbour, in order to see the town and visit the tombs of his ancestors who were buried there, that he might sprinkle them with holy water and pray to God for their souls.

To this the Viceroy accorded very readily. The Grand Prior thereupon advanced and renewed the salvo with as fine and thundrous a peal as before, both with the maindeck guns of the sixteen galleys and with other artillery and arquebus fire, so that the fleet seemed all aflame, and then advanced in great magnificence towards the mole, with flags and pennons flying, decked out with standards of crimson silk, his own being of damask, the galley slaves attired in crimson velvet, as were the soldiers of the guard, with mantles brodered in silver, the captain of whom was Geoffroy of Provence, a courageous and valiant soldier. In a word, all saw our galleys to be fine and brave and well-equipped, and above all the *Royal*, in which not a fault could be found, for indeed he was a most liberal and open-handed Prince.

So being arrived at the mole in this fair array, he landed with his suite, where the Viceroy had ordered to have ready horses & chariots to receive

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us and convey us to the town, where (upon my word) we found full a hundred horses, coursers, jennets, Spanish steeds, barbs, and others, and each finer than the last, with saddlecloths of broidered velvet, some silver and some gold. Those that would ride on horse-back mounted; those that would drive entered the coaches, of which there were a score of the finest and richest, fairly harnessed and drawn by the most noble coursers ever seen. There were also many great princes and lords, of both *Naples* and Spain, who received the Grand Prior most honourably, on behalf of the Viceroy. Thereafter he mounted a Spanish horse, the finest I have seen for long, which was later given to him by the Viceroy, and being as good a horseman as he was a seaman, he put the horse through his paces in the most graceful style, managing his mount most brilliantly, so that all spoke of it, for he was one of the most handsome Princes of the time, & one of the most agreeable and accomplished, of a tall, fine, and well-knit figure, such as is rarely seen among great men. And thus was he conducted by all these nobles and other gentlemen to the palace of the Viceroy, who awaited him, receiving him with every honour, lodging him at his own house, and feasting him sumptuously, with all his guard. This he could well afford to do, since he profited to the amount of twenty thousand crowns by this journey. We must have been about two hundred gentlemen, captains of galleys and others, that were lodged with him and most of the great nobles of the city, and all most magnificently.

On leaving our chambers in the morning, we would find attendants so well trained that they would present themselves immediately to ask our desires, and whither we wished to go. And if we wished for horses or coaches, at once, no sooner said than done, for they would speed away to find the mounts we desired, and all were so fine, so rich and beautiful as to satisfy a King; and so to our day's pleasure, each as it pleased him best. Indeed, we were almost spoiled by excess of pleasure and delight in this town, of which there was no lack, for I have never seen a town so well furnished with every sort of diversion, since only one was lacking—familiar converse, both frank & free, with ladies of honour & reputation,

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though there was no lack of plenty of the other sort. But this was well amended by the courtesy of that Marquise de Goast in whose honour the present Discourse is written, for she, being a full gracious lady and honourable, and for the greater honour of her house, having heard of the Grand Prior as a gentleman of great virtue and perfection, and having seen him pass through the town on horse-back and recognized his merit, as greatness oft will recognize its like, so she out of her greatness and nobility one day sent to him a gentleman of her suite, upright and well-mannered, to greet the Grand Prior and inform him that if her sex and the custom of the country had permitted it, she would gladly have visited him, to offer him all her service, as the nobles of the kingdom had done. But she begged him to accept her excuses, and therewith the use of her houses, her castles, and her willing service in all.

The Grand Prior, who was no less courteous, thanked her from his heart, as was fitting, signifying that he would come to kiss her hands incontinently after dinner. He waited on her presently with all his suite, finding her in the great hall with her two daughters, Donna Antonina & Donna Hieronima—or else Donna Hoanna; I cannot be certain, for the name has slipped my memory—and many other fair dames and damsels, so richly attired and of such beauty and grace that, outside the Courts of France and Spain, I have never seen a fairer assembly of ladies.

The Marquise saluted the Grand Prior after the French fashion, with every mark of honour, which he returned with even more humility, and *con mas gran sosiego* (with the greatest respect) as they say in Spain. Their discourse was on this occasion of common matters, while those of the rest of us who could speak Italian or Spanish conversed with the other ladies, whom we found most honourable & gallant & of agreeable address.

On our departure, the Marquise, having learned that the Grand Prior intended to stay a fortnight in the town, said to him: 'Sir, if you should ever know not what to do and lack entertainment, and it should please you to come hither, you will do me great honour, and you shall be welcome as it were the house of your lady mother, which I pray you to use

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and dispose of as though it were your own, neither more nor less. I have the good fortune to be loved and visited of fair and honest ladies of the Kingdom and of this city, as much as any, and since by your youth and virtue you must needs love the conversation of honourable ladies, I will pray them to visit me even more often than they use, that they may bear you company and the noble gentlemen who are with you. Here are my two daughters, whom I will bid, although they are not so accomplished as they should be, to bear you company in the French fashion, and to laugh, dance, play and talk freely, modestly and honestly, as you do at the French Court. And I would gladly offer myself also, but that it would be tedious to a young Prince, handsome and gallant as you are, to entertain a superannuated old woman, tiresome and disagreeable like myself; for of a truth youth and age accord not well together.'

The Grand Prior protested at once against these words, vowing that age had gained no hold upon her, and that he would not hear such things, for her autumn surpassed all the springs and summers assembled in the hall. And indeed she appeared a most fair and lovable woman still, even more than her two daughters, young and beautiful as they were; yet she was then close on sixty. These few words of the Grand Prior gave her much pleasure, as we could see by her smiling face, her words and her manner.

We left the house exceedingly delighted with the Marquise—above all the Grand Prior, who had straightway fallen in love with her, as he declared. Hence it was not surprising that the fair and honest lady, and her fair suite of dames, drew the Grand Prior to visit her house every day, for if we did not go for dinner we went in the evening. The Grand Prior took her elder daughter as his mistress, although he loved the mother the more, but this was done *per adumbrar la cosa*—to screen the thing.

There were many tiltings at the ring, where the Grand Prior bore off the prize, and many ballets and dances. In brief, this fine company was the reason why, thinking to stay but fifteen days, we remained for six weeks, without ever wearying, for the rest of us had found as charming

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mistresses as our general. And we had stayed even longer had not a courier brought news from the King his master of war broken out in Spain, wherefore we had to weigh anchor and journey from the eastern coast to the western, although they did not in fact cross over until eight months later.

In this wise we had to resign these pleasing delights, and to leave the fair and gracious town of *Naples*, not without great sadness and regret to our General and to us all, for we were irked indeed to quit a place we had found so kind.

At the end of six years, or perhaps more, when we were on our way to rescue *Malta*, I was once more at *Naples*, where I made enquiry whether the Marquise de Goast was still alive; they told me yes, that she was then in the town. I made instant haste to see her, and was at once recognized by an old chamberlain of her house, who went to tell his mistress that I desired to kiss her hands once more. She, remembering my name of Bourdeille, had me brought up to her chamber to see her. I found her a-bed, by reason of a little eruption which she had on her cheek, and upon my word she gave me a very warm welcome. I found her very little changed, and still so fair that one would commit a mortal sin for her, whether in desire or in deed.

She asked me eagerly for news of the late Grand Prior, and how he had died, saying that she was told he had been poisoned, calling down a hundred curses on the wretch whose work it was. I told her no, that she should rid her mind of the idea, for he had died of a treacherous pleurisy he had caught at the battle of *Dreux*, where he had fought like a Cæsar all day. But in the evening, after the last charge, being greatly heated by the fight and sweating, when he retired at night there was a bitter frost, which chilled him to the marrow. He tried to hide his sickness, of which he died a month or six weeks later.

Her words and her manner shewed her deep regret for him. Nor had he forgotten her, for two or three years before he had sent off two galleys on a freebooters' expedition under Captain Beaulieu, one of the Lieutenants of his galleys. He had taken the flag of the Queen of Scots, which

had never before been seen or known in Eastern waters, whereat folk marvelled much—for he could not possibly take that of France, because of the alliance with Turkey. He gave orders to Captain Beaulieu to land at *Naples* and to visit on his behalf the Marquise and her daughters, sending many presents to the three, of all the little novelties which were in fashion at the Court and Palace in *Paris* and in the rest of France, for the Grand Prior was ever full of generosity and magnificence. Captain Beaulieu did not fail to obey these orders, and to present the gifts, whereupon he was very well received, and recompensed for his mission with a fine present.

The Marquise was delighted with these gifts and the Grand Prior's remembrance of her, as she told me again and again, for which courtesy she loved him yet the more. For love of him she did a graceful action to a Gascon gentleman, who was then in the galleys under the Grand Prior, whom we had left on our departure still in the town, sick to death. But he was so fortunate that, appealing to the Marquise in his adversity, she lent him aid, & his life was saved. Thereafter she took him into her household, tending him so well that when a captaincy in one of her castles fell vacant she bestowed it upon him, and espoused him to a rich woman.

None of us knew what had happened to the gentleman, thinking him dead; but on this voyage to *Malta* there chanced to be a younger brother of him of whom I have spoken who one day in casual talk told me that the chief reason of his going abroad was to seek news of a brother of his who had been in the service of the Grand Prior, and who had been left behind sick at *Naples* more than six years before, since which time he had heard no more of him. Whereupon I began to recollect the matter, and anon asked for news of him of the servants of the Marquise, who told me of his good fortune, the which I at once reported to his brother, who thanked me heartily, and came with me to visit the lady: she took him also into favour, and visited him where he was staying.

Truly a generous act, done for the memory of a past friendship; nor was this all, for she entertained me even better than before, talking long

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with me over the good days gone, & of many other things, which caused me to find her company most pleasant and delightful, for she had a fine and ready wit, and was apt in speech.

She begged me a hundred times over to take neither meal nor lodging elsewhere, but to this I would not agree, it being never my habit to be importunate or self-seeking. I would go to see her each day during the seven or eight days of our stay, & was ever made welcome, her chamber being open to me at all times without difficulty.

When I bade her adieu, she gave me certain letters of recommendation to her son, the Marquis de Pescaire, at that time General in the Spanish army, & made me promise that on my return I would visit her, nor lodge under other roof than hers.

But alas for my ill-fortune, the galleys landed only at *Terracina*, whence we went to *Rome*, nor was I able to return: furthermore I desired to join the wars in Hungary, but while in *Venice* we learned of the death of the great Sultan Soliman. I cursed my luck then a hundred times that I had not returned to *Naples*, where I might so pleasantly have passed my time. And indeed, by favour of the Marquise I might well have fallen upon good fortune, either in marriage or otherwise, for of a truth she honoured me with great regard.

But my evil fate seemed to will it otherwise, & led me back to France and ill-fortune, where never has kind destiny smiled on me, save in appearances and the reputation of being a gallant man of worth and honour, but never in bestowing wealth or rank as on certain of my companions; & some of even lower estate, who would have thought themselves happy if I spoke a word to them in a courtyard, in a chamber of the King or Queen, or a hall, even if it were aside or over my shoulder, to-day are become great and mighty as quick as pumpkins, so that I have naught to do with them and hold them no greater than I, nor would I defer to them in aught, were it the veriest trifle.

Ah well! I may indeed take to myself the proverb which our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced with his own lips. No man is a prophet in his

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own country. Had I per adventure, served foreign Princes as well as I have served my own, & sought adventure among them as I have among these, I should by now be more laden with wealth & dignities than with years and sorrows. But patience! if my Fate has so spun the thread, my curse be upon her; if my Princes are to blame, I consign them to all the devils, if they are not there already.

And so my tale is concluded of this honourable dame, who died with a great reputation as having been a fair and honest lady and having left behind her a noble & generous line—the Marquis her eldest, Don Juan, Don Carlos, Don Cæsar d'Avalos, all of whom I have seen, & spoken of elsewhere: the daughters too have followed the example of their brothers. And now do I make an end of my principal Discourse.

VOLUME II.

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE FRENCH BY *F M*

THE FIFTH DISCOURSE

*Of the Love of Fair & Honest Ladies for Men of
Valour, & of Brave Men for Courageous Ladies*

THERE NEVER WAS A TIME, BUT FAIR & HONEST Ladies loved men of valour, though of their own nature they are timid and shrinking: or is it just for this that valour has such virtue in their eyes? How odd to attract the love of one's opposite; aye, & to do so by intention in the teeth of one's nature! That 'tis true of ladies we have proof in Venus herself, who was the goddess of beauty and of all nicety and refinement; dwelling moreover in the heavens and at the court of Jupiter, where she had a choice of lovers both handsome and nice, to make a cuckold of poor old Vulcan her husband: did she go and choose any of the dainty courtiers, any of the curled and oiled ones who fluttered round her? She chose and fell madly in love with Mars, the god of armies and valiant feats! 'though he came to her all begrimed, all sweaty from the war and caked with dust; a pretty sight, and smelling rather of the shambles than of the Court, with clots of blood on him very often (it is likely); & so this horror would get into her bed, without other cleansing or scenting of himself than the sheets might give, and the sweet person of the goddess.

¶ The noble and beauteous Queen Penthesilea, hearing talk of the valour and the valiance of doughty Hector, and his marvellous feats of arms against the Greeks before *Troy*, at the fame of it only became so enamoured of him, that nothing would satisfy her but to have children by her hero, namely daughters to succeed her in the Amazon Kingdom; so she started out for *Troy* to find him. Having seen him and contemplated him and admired him, she did all in her power to win his favour; not only by her beauty, which was of the rarest, but also by feats of arms. Never did Hector make a sally against the besiegers but she accompanied him, and was even before Hector in entering the fray, wherever it raged hottest; so that she is said by her prowess to have astonished him, for he would often stop short in the midst of hard combats, and as if ravished take a position aside, to watch at his ease the beautiful strokes dealt by this brave Queen.

Thereafter it is a question for the world, whether the admiration

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between these two ever turned to love, and if so whether it was carried to a sweet conclusion. There will be only one opinion, I fancy. But in any case their pleasure could not last long; for Penthesilea so desired to shine in the eyes of her lover, and rushed into danger so persistently, that she must have been killed in some fierce and bloody conflict. Some say, indeed, that she never saw Hector, for that he was killed before she arrived; and that learning it then, she fell into so passionate a grief not to have had a sight of the one man for desire of whom she had come that distance, that she went out and sought death in the bloodiest battles; and so died this Queen, not caring to survive the unseen hero, whom she had chosen above all and loved the most deeply.

¶ Of like enterprize was the Amazon Thalestris, who crossed a great tract of country, travelling I know not how many leagues, for to find Alexander the Great; whom she asked as a favour to give her progeny of such noble blood, as she had heard his rated on account of his deeds; or rather, let us say, she offered as a fair exchange to lie with him, after the manner of exchange in those good times. Alexander for his part readily agreed; indeed he must have been spoilt by satiety otherwise, for this Queen was as beautiful as brave.

Three historians, Quintus Curtius and Ciosius and Justin, declare that she came with a suite of three hundred ladies, and no regiment was ever better appointed, nor carried its arms with such a grace; thus she gave a grand salute to Alexander, who welcomed her with every honour. Remaining with him thirteen days & nights, she submitted herself in every thing to his pleasure and fancy; telling him always that if he gave her a daughter, she would guard it as a most precious treasure, but if a son she would send it back to him; so extreme was her hatred of the male sex, at least in the matter of reigning or having command among her people, whose laws all dated from the killing of their husbands. I presume that her ladies and lieutenant-ladies all did likewise, and had officers of Alexander to cover them, each one according to her rank; for they must needs follow their mistress through thick and thin.

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¶ Then there was the fair virgin Camilla, as noble as beautiful, who in her devotion to Diana must follow the Goddess in everything, and daily took her hounds to the mountain or the forest. Camilla, having sniffed the valour of Turnus in the wind, & the war he then waged with another man of valour (who pressed him sore, for it was the great Æneas), at once in imagination took the part of Turnus; and, impulsive as guileless, she set out to find him, accompanied only by three fair and honest ladies, who were always her close and confidential friends; bed-companions too, we may suppose, and partners in her virgin pleasures. In all situations she made use of these three, such honour they had with their Princess, as Vergil tells us in his *Æneid*. One was called Armia the valiant virgin, another Tullia and the third Tarpeia, this last being skilled with the pike and dart, and that in more senses than one perhaps: ah me! they were all three daughters of Italy. So Camilla with her little band—little and fair is good, as the saying is—came and found Turnus, with whom she did some splendid feats of arms. But so often did she in the forefront of the battle pit herself against the bravest of the Trojans, that she was killed ere long; and great grief it was to Turnus her captain, who had come to hold her in high honour, as well for her beauty as for the good help she gave him.

¶ See how these fair Ladies, so valiant themselves, went in search of heroes & helped them in their wars & struggles. What lit such a flame of love in poor Dido's breast, but the valour she felt in her Æneas? naught else, if we are to believe Vergil. For she had prayed him to tell her the story of the war, with the sack & desolation of *Troy*, which he gave her in full to please her; 'though to himself 'twas little pleasure to recall those sorrows, even if his own valour made a great part of the story, as Dido was quick to notice. She pondered it all for some days, and when she confided to her sister Anne the love in her heart, her first words and the most meaning were these: 'Ah sister! what guest is this who is come to my Court? Such grace of manner as he has! & how it shews forth the valour that is in him, whether to act or to endure! Never doubt but he is sprung

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from some race of the gods, for base-born men are ever cowardly.' Such were her words; and when love took root in her, be sure 'twas because she saw Æneas brave and generous, and her instinct moved her to choose her like, without reckoning of the gain his service would be to her in case of need. Yet the wretch played false, and abandoned her to misery: 'twas shame for him to treat so this honourable lady, who had given him the love of her heart, and him but a wandering outlaw!

¶ Boccaccio, in his book of *Famous Unfortunates*, has a tale of a Duchess of *Furly*, by name Romilda, who lost her husband and lands and goods in a raid, which Caucan, King of the Avarese, made; she was forced to retire with her children into her castle of *Furly*, where Caucan came and besieged her. But one day that he came near to reconnoitre, Romilda saw him from the top of a tower, and long she gazed at him; for what she saw was a beautiful man in the prime of life, on a beautiful horse & in superb armour; who was performing splendid feats, & not sparing himself more than the least of his soldiers. The Duchess fell headlong in love; and, putting off the mourning she wore for her husband, lived in a dream, neglecting all the business of the castle and its defence. She sent a herald to Caucan, to say, that if he would take her in marriage, she would surrender the place on the day the marriage was solemnized. The King took her at her word; & the appointed day having come, she was arrayed in her grandest ducal robes, which added to her beauty in matching its splendour. When she arrived at the camp for the consummation of the marriage, the King acquitted himself of any possible charge of breaking faith, by sharing his couch with the Duchess for a night, throughout which he spared no labour to assuage her heat.

Then, having risen, he sent for a dozen of his Avarese soldiers, the strongest & roughest he could think of, & put Romilda into their hands to take their pleasure of her by turns; and these did their worst on her for another whole night. When morning came again, Caucan had the lady brought before him, & charging her with a shameless lust, he heaped every contemptuous name on her; then he had her lifted and impaled

through her tender body, saying brutally she should have the stake where she desired it, and she died of the outrage. Surely a cruel and barbarous act, so to treat a fair and honest lady! instead of recognising her motive, which was admiration of his valour and belief in his generosity, and rewarding her with every courtesy.

His was a character that ladies should bear in mind. Such captains exist who are so accustomed to killing, to brandishing the sword & hewing savagely, that sometimes the humour takes them to do the same on ladies. The most of men fortunately are different; and when honourable ladies do us the honour to love us for our valour, and for the virtues they associate with it, we leave in the camp our raging furies, and in courts and chambers become all tenderness, as befits.

¶ Bandello in his *Tragic Histories* has a tale, which is the prettiest I ever read, of a Duchess of Savoy, who one day as she went out of her city of *Turin*, heard a Spanish pilgrim (on his way to *Loretto* for some vow) cry out in admiration of her beauty; saying aloud, but in his own tongue, that if a lady so perfect in beauty were married to his brother, the handsome Señor of Mendoza and bravest of the brave, then the world might truly say, that the fittest match had been made of two supreme persons. Now the Duchess understood Spanish very well, and, having engraved these words in her mind, after a while she found love engraving itself also; till she became from this chance word so impassioned, that the Señor of Mendoza was never out of her thoughts. She knew no peace till she had started on a feigned pilgrimage, making for *S. James of Compostella* as the nearest shrine to that place where she might hope to see the man she was so quickly enamoured of.

When her journey had brought her into Spain, but she was still some distance from *Mendoza*, she had an early opportunity of satisfying her eyes, by gazing on the object of her desire; and this is how it happened: The Duchess was accompanied by a sister of the Señor, who had warned him of the visit of so honourable a lady, and, as courtesy required, he came out to meet her on the road. Mounted on a fine Spanish horse he

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appeared, well equipped at every point and with such grace of bearing, that the Duchess might well be content with the report she had heard of him; great was her admiration indeed, as well for his beauty as for his noble style, which seemed to her an expression of the valour in his heart. And with it her enthusiasm discerned other virtues & accomplishments, which led her as in a trance to see a day, when, as her champion, he should rally to her need: nor did he fail her when that day came, for it was the Señor of Mendoza who defended her honour when Count Pascalier made false accusation against her chastity. But, in the present instance, she had to complain that he was a coward in love, however valiant he might be in war; for he shewed himself so coldly respectful towards her, as never to make any assault even of tender words. And as this was her chief desire and the purpose of her journey, she fell into such a fit of vexation, that she parted from him the next day; and returning was far less content than she had hoped.

¶ This shews how ladies sometimes expect that men shall exhibit boldness in love as well as in war; not that they would have effrontery from us, the sort of boldness that comes of stupidity (and in many cases I have observed it to have this origin)—but we must strike a happy mean in the matter. I have known many lovers, through failure in this, to lose good chances; of which I could tell some good stories, but am afraid of being side-tracked in my discourse: I will just tell this one, if I may, and keep the rest for their proper place.

'Tis of a lady I heard tell of long ago, one of the most beautiful in the world in her day, who, like these others, was moved to love by the renown of a warlike Prince; who in his youth was said to be already master of all feats of arms, and in particular had won two signal victories over his country's enemies.' The lady had a great desire to see him, and for this purpose made a journey into the province where he was then stationed, on some other pretext that matters not. Having made a start she eventually came—for what is impossible to a brave heart in love?—where she could see him and regard him at her leisure; for he met her far out on

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the road, and welcomed her with all the honour due to so great a lady, so fair and magnanimous a Princess. Alas! there was only too much of the honour & respect; in fact it was the story of the Señor of Mendoza & the Duchess of Savoy over again, and a like vexation and discontent were the result, the lady departing far less pleased with him than she had come. It may be that he would have wasted his time in attempts, for that she only wanted these, and would not have yielded to his pleasure; but even if the lady were of this kind, his attempt would have been a fault on the right side, and one would think the more of that Prince.

¶ What avails a bold heart, if its quality is not shewn in every field, as well before the challenge of love as of war? for these two are comrades marching shoulder to shoulder, and confront us under one banner. What says the poet?

*A man at arms is every lover true,
And Cupid has his camp as well as Mars.*

A fine sonnet that of Master Ronsard, in his first book of *Loves!*

¶ To return now to that virtuous curiosity which ladies have for a sight of, aye, and for the love of, brave and generous men, I have heard a story of Queen Elizabeth of England, the same who is on the throne to this day. Being one day at the supper table, to which she had invited the Grand Prior of France, who was a nobleman of the house of Lorraine, also M. d'Amville, whom we know now as M. de Montmorency the Constable of France, the Queen in face of this company, beginning as was natural with the praise of our late King Henry II, became quite immoderate in praise of his valour & other knightly virtues; using especially the phrase 'true warrior,' which she said he had proved himself in all his actions. Therefore it had been her intention to go and see him in his Kingdom, and but for his early death she would so have done; for she actually had her galleys fitted out, and all was in readiness for her to pass into France; where they two, joining hands in good faith, would have pledged at least their peace. 'Twas a passion of mine to see him,' she confessed, 'and I

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believe he would not have refused me; he would recognize that my love is for valour in men. My curse on Death¹ who snatched away so beautiful a king, without allowing me even a sight of him.'

This same Queen, some time after, hearing of the valour and all the perfection of M. de Nemours,² had the curiosity to make enquiry concerning him of the late M. de Rendan when he was in Scotland; whither he was sent by King Francis II to make peace under the walls of *Lenth*, then being besieged. He related to the Queen at length whatever concerned M. de Nemours, giving the full tale of his virtues; and observed the while how first the spark of love appeared in her eyes, and then how her words but poorly veiled a burning desire to see the hero; for M. de Rendan had as good understanding of love as of war. Being pleased with this beginning, he went on to sound the Queen as to whether, if M. de Nemours should pay her a visit, she would welcome him seriously; and, being assured of her on that point, he saw no reason why a marriage should not come of it.

So when M. de Rendan returned to Court on the accomplishment of his mission, he acquainted both the King and M. de Nemours with the whole conversation; with the result that the King strongly urged on the project, while as for M. de Nemours, he was only too delighted to think of obtaining so splendid a Kingdom, by means of a Queen at once so beautiful & so virtuous. To cut a long story short, the preparations were put in the fire; great preparations were made by help of the King's generosity; the costumes & equipment were of the first magnificence. What with horses, and arms, and exquisite ornaments, I (who saw all) can say that nothing was wanting which could increase the splendour of that nobleman's appearance in England; above all he was to be attended by the very flower of our courtiers, so that Greffier the fool exclaimed of the retinue, that it was a very *Bean-Feast*; thus poking fun at the wild young bloods of the Court, as being set about a *Bean-King*, or a King who is no King.

Meanwhile the able and accomplished M. de Ligneolles, then a great favourite with M. de Nemours his master, was despatched to the Court

of Elizabeth; whence he returned with an amiable message, such as to gratify any lover and make him hurry on his journey. I remember that at Court we considered the pair as good as married, but suddenly we became aware of a hitch, for the preparations were broken off; & in the end there was no journey taken, & all that expense had been a useless vanity. Myself could say, as well as any man in France, to what this rupture must be referred, but must be content in passing to give a hint: Is it not possible that there were other and nearer loves, which put bonds on this nobleman and stayed his adventuring? We know that under the charm of his accomplishments many ladies had thrown themselves at his feet; some breaking their fast of chastity for love of him, and these some of the most refined and modest, as I can bear witness.

¶ In the *Hundred Tales* of Queen Margaret of Navarre we have a pretty story, of that lady of *Milan*, who, having given an assignation to the late M. de Bonnivet, in the days before he became Admiral of France, supplied the ladies of her bed-chamber with naked swords and instructed them, so soon as he should be ready to get into bed, to make a threatening clatter on the stairs; & well they did the bidding of their mistress, who for her part played the alarmed and timorous lady, saying 'twas her brothers-in-law whose suspicion was aroused, and she was lost! and he must hide under the bed, quick! or behind the tapestry! But M. de Bonnivet shewed not the least sign of alarm, he threw his cloak over his left arm & taking his sword in his right hand he said to her: 'Now where are these brave brothers of yours, who think to frighten me at least, if not to hurt me? When they see me, I fancy, they will not dare so much as to look at the point of my sword!' Then, opening the door & going out, he was about to make a charge down the stairs, when he discovered the women with their strange cymbals; who cried out in fear and were confessing all. M. de Bonnivet, when he saw it was no more than this, left them there with a recommendation to the devil, and returning to the room shut the door after him; whereon the lady began to laugh and threw her arms round him, confessing that it was a joke of hers, but at the same time letting

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him know that if he had played the poltroon, then never should he have lain in her bed. And so for the noble assurance that he had shewn she embraced him, and sweetly drew him down to her side; and what they two did that night we must not ask; for she was one of the loveliest ladies of *Milan*, and he had been at great pains to win her.

¶ I knew a brave gentleman myself, who once at Rome was in bed with a fine lady (in the absence of her husband, be it understood), when she sprang an alarm on him of the same sort; getting one of her women to rush in with a warning, that the husband was returning from the hunt. The woman, with every sign of dismay, implored him to hide in a closet, or her mistress would be lost; but the gentleman said: 'No, no! I would not do that for the whole world; if your husband come I shall kill him.' When he sprang for his sword the lady burst out laughing, & confessed she had arranged the little scene for to have proof, what he would do should her husband come, and whether she could rely on him to defend her.

¶ There was a fair lady of my acquaintance who threw over a lover promptly, for a failure on the point of valour; exchanging him for another not to be compared for looks, but who was the terror of all for his sword, having few betters at that in his day.

¶ I heard a story at Court told by the older people, of a court-lady that was mistress of the late M. de Lorge (Ah! a good man that, and in his young days one of the most famous captains of foot). She, having heard so much praise of his valour, took it into her head one day that there was a combat of lions before King Francis I, to make proof if he was all she had heard; so deliberately she let fall one of her gloves into the arena, when the fury of the lions was at its height; then prayed M. de Lorge to go and fetch it, if indeed he loved her so much as he said. He gave no sign of dismay or even surprize, but folding his cloak over his left hand and taking his sword in the other, went boldly into the midst of the lions to recover the glove; in which he was happily successful, for so steady was his eye and so resolute his bearing, as he faced the lions with his sword-point always toward them, that not one of the brutes dared rush upon

him. Having picked up the glove he returned to his mistress, & solemnly presented it to her; winning great admiration for the deed, not only of her but of all the lookers on; but it is said that M. de Lorge left the lady from that day, being justly vexed at her flippancy, in thus making a pastime of him and his valour. Some say even that he threw the glove in her face; for he had rather a hundred times have charged a battalion of foot-soldiers, being commanded to the work he was trained for, than have to go fighting wild beasts, of whom there is at any rate no honour to be gained. Certainly such tests are neither fair nor proper, & persons who contrive them are much to blame.

¶ I like as little a trick played by another lady on her lover, who, in offering his service, had declared that there was nothing however dangerous he would not do for her. Taking him at his word she said to him: 'If you love me so much and are as courageous as you say, stick your dagger in your arm now for love of me.' The man was dying of love; he did not hesitate to draw, and was on the point of stabbing himself, when I, being present, seized his arm & took away the weapon; then I persuaded him, that it would be great folly in such a manner to give proof of his love and his valour. I shall not give the name of the lady, but the gentleman was the late M. de Clermont-Tallard, the elder, who met his death at the battle of *Moncontour*; a true nobleman of France, as he shewed himself that day in command of a company of infantry, & one whom I loved & honoured greatly.

¶ I have heard that the late M. de Genlis had a similar experience, he who fell in Germany leading the Huguenots in the third rising; for his mistress in crossing the river one day with him before the *Louvre*, deliberately let fall a costly handkerchief in the water, and told him he should throw himself in to recover it. Now M. de Genlis could only swim like a stone, and rightly asked to be excused; but the lady reproached him for a cowardly lover, whereon he threw himself headlong in without another word, and certainly would have been drowned in this attempt to save a handkerchief, had he not been quickly picked up by another boat.

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My own belief is that ladies, in demanding such proofs, are anxious to rid themselves easily of lovers, who, maybe, have grown tedious to them; a better plan would be to give their lovers tokens and pray them for love's sake to wear these to the wars, and there in perilous places to prove their valour; it would be better even to drive them thither, than to make them perform stupidities such as I have related, & could relate to any number. ¶ This reminds me of Mademoiselle de Piennes, an honourable young lady of the Court, and what she did when we besieged Rouen in the first rising. having her doubts whether the late M. de Gergeay had it in him to kill (as he was said to have done, alone and man to man) the late Baron d'Ingrande, who was one of the most valiant of our noblemen, she decided to test this M. de Gergeay, by giving him a scarf to wear on his helmet as a love-token. A little while afterwards we made a reconnaissance of *Fort Saint Catherine*, and her knight with such reckless courage fell on a troop of horse sallying out of the town, that in the engagement he received a pistol-shot in the head, which laid him stark dead on the spot: so the lady was satisfied of his valour, and but for this misfortune would have married him for the deed; but first she must needs have this evidence, as she said, to remove her doubts as to his having fairly killed the said Baron, and as to his courage in general. It is not to be denied that there is a class of men, valiant enough by nature, who are yet stimulated to greater deeds by ladies, egging them on when they are at all cold or indolent.

¶ We have a good example of this in the beautiful Agnes Sorel, who, seeing King Charles VII so enamoured of her as not to have a thought in the world but to make love to her, and by his sentimentality and soft going losing his grip on the Kingdom, said to him one day, when she was still a girl hardly grown, that an astrologer had predicted to her of her lover to be, that he should be the most valiant and courageous King in Christendom; and as she saw King Charles so soft and careless of his honour, she knew (so she told him) that she had been deceived in him, and that her valiant King was the King of England, who performed such

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fine feats of arms, 'and plucks,' says she, 'so many fair cities out of your beard! Wherefore I am going now to find him, for it can be no other that the astrologer meant.' Her words so pierced the heart of the King, that he began at first a lover's lament; but soon his courage rose within him, and, leaving the pleasures of the garden and the chase, he fairly took the bit between his teeth, and his valour being helped by fortune he chased the English from his Kingdom.

¶ In the Fourteenth Century there was Bertrand de Guesclin, who, after his marriage to the Lady Tiphany¹ gave himself up to pleasure, letting slide the war in which he had been previously so distinguished, and had won glory far and wide. The lady made it a bitter reproach to him, that before their marriage the talk had been all of him & his exploits, whereas now it was of herself, whom all blamed for her husband's corruption. She insisted on the disgrace it was to both of them, him to have become such a stay-at-home; giving him no peace, till she had aroused his former courage and sent him to the war, where he did even better than before. See how this honourable lady loved her husband's honour, even more than the pleasures of the night! In the same way our wives, we may be sure, though they accept our presence in bed, cannot love us nor hold us with a good heart, unless we are brave and active by day; when we come back to them from war with some deed to our credit, it is then their embraces have meaning and there is joy in love.

¶ A brother of King Louis the Saint was Earl Charles of Anjou, who married the fourth daughter of the Earl of Provence; but 'though this lady⁴ was thus sister-in-law of the King, her ambitious nature was not content with the title of Countess, while two of her sisters were Queens and the third an Empress; and so she never ceased praying and pestering her husband, to go (if you please) and conquer some Kingdom. When he began to take steps to that end she certainly gave him every help, and at last the two of them succeeded so well that they were chosen by Pope Urban King and Queen of the Two Sicilies; so they came to Rome with thirty galleys to be crowned by His Holiness, receiving also with due

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magnificence the Kingdoms of Naples and of Jerusalem, which last had yet to be conquered by its King. In this the valour of his arms was so well backed by the means of his wife, who sold all her jewels to furnish the cost of the war, that the object was attained, and they had long and peaceful enjoyment of their conquered Kingdoms. Long afterwards they had a worthy grand-daughter in Ysabel of Lorraine, who in the absence of her husband René shewed a like determination; for when he was a prisoner in the hands of Charles Duke of Bergundy, and Naples was lost which was her rightful inheritance, this lady in the greatness of her heart raised an army of thirty thousand men, and herself taking the lead recovered Naples by force.

¶ I could name numberless ladies who have given great service in this way, & who by their own ambition have so infected their husbands, that these, daring greatly, got themselves grandeur and wealth; which indeed are only honourable when won by the sword. I have known many a man in our own France, who, acting on the urgency of his wife as if it were his own will, carried through many splendid undertakings.

On the other hand I have known women who cared for nothing but their own sweet pleasures, and withheld their husbands from deeds of honour so as to have them always about them; nor would they let these have any amusement at home, but only in the game of Venus to which themselves were so devoted. Of such I could tell many stories, but they are unworthy of my theme, which is the praise of virtue and is little concerned with pleasure merely; so I will return to those ladies who urge men to deeds of honour.

¶ I speak not merely of wives, there are many others who for some little favour only have been the cause that their lovers have been roused to deeds beyond themselves. For what ease of mind it is to a man, how his heart swells in the hour of danger, only to know that he has the love of a faithful mistress! And if he do anything splendid for sake of that love, what joy to think of the smiles, the tender glances and all the pretty and delicious favours, which he can count on receiving at their next meeting,

Among the rebukes which Scipio gave to Massinissa, who with the reek of blood still on him went to his wedding with Sophonisba, he said it was improper for a man to think of love & ladies while engaged in war. Now if Scipio will be so good as to pardon me, it is my own opinion (as I have said) that there is no such solace to a man, and no such encouragement to high endeavour, as the thought of his lady. I have travelled that road myself in years past; & I believe that all soldiers will agree with me; I am willing to abide by their decision. When they were in some hot passage of arms, with the enemy pressing them hard on all sides, was not their courage doubled, did not their hearts leap up at the thought of their ladies, as looking at the tokens of love they wore into battle, they envisaged the smiles and the open arms that awaited them, should they win out that day and have safe return? Aye, and did not even death lose its terror when they told themselves, how fondly their loss would be wept? I say that every enterprize becomes easy for a soldier, who has the love of a lady to fix his mind on; all battles then are but tournaments and death itself is a triumph.

¶ The late M. des Bordes was as good a cavalier as any of his day, I remember his words at the battle of Dreux, where he acted as lieutenant to M. de Nevers: a charge was necessary to break up a battalion of infantry, which was marching direct on the advance-guard commanded by M. de Guise (the Great), & when the signal was given M. des Bordes shot forward, mounted on a grey Arab with a love-token fluttering gaily from his helmet—I shall not give the name of his mistress, but she was a great lady of the Court and fair as honourable—and the parting words of her lover were these, sung out to Count d'Eu, a figure as brilliant as himself: 'Ha! I go to fight bravely for the love of my mistress, & if need be to die gloriously!' M. des Bordes was as good as his word; having penetrated six ranks of the enemy, he was borne down at the seventh and killed on the ground. Reader, in your opinion, did not this lady give her favour to good purpose; and had she to blame herself in anything for giving it?

¶ No young man of his day did such honour to his mistress' favours as

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M. de Bussi. I myself know some of the ladies in question; and in truth they were deserving of as many martial exploits as ever were done for the fair Angelica by knights & paladins of old, when Christians & Saracens alike were under her spell. I have heard say of M. de Bussi, that in every single combat or general engagement wherein he took part, (& there was a goodly number of both), he thought not so much of his own honour, or his King's, as of glorifying and giving pleasure to his lady; and surely he was right in this, for all the advancement in the world is not worth the love which a fair and honest lady gives to her faithful servant.

Why did so many brave knights errant of the Round Table, so many valiant paladins, too, of ancient France, take on themselves so many wars, why go on such far journeys and such romantic quests, if not for love of the fair ladies whom they served or hoped to serve? We of France can recall our Rolands and our Renauds, our Ogiers and our Oliviers, our Yvons & our Richards, to mention only a few names that come to mind. Ah! 'twas a good time & a fortunate for those born in it; if they did any valiant thing for love of their ladies, those ladies were gracious and knew how to reward them; giving them lover's appointments in glades of the forest, beside fountains or in flowery meads! Such is the guerdon the brave desire of ladies!

¶ But the question now arises, why is it that women so love men of valour? Remember what I said at the beginning about valour, it has this peculiar power or virtue of arousing love in its opposite; and in addition there is in ladies a natural tendency to love noble qualities, which at the least are more attractive than cowardice. Vice arouses no love, as do all virtues.

There are some ladies whose love of valour is founded in the belief, that when a man is thus proficient in the trade of Mars, he will be as good in that of Venus; and in the case of many the rule holds good, as notably Cæsar, that champion of the world, and certain valorous men of my acquaintance who must be nameless. Such men have at once a strength and a grace, not to be found in rustics or in men of other professions; so that a bout with one of them is worth four with any other sort; but this will

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only interest ladies who in their heat for love are not immoderate, the others (I know) care more for number than for quality. But if this rule holds good for certain men, and is suited to the humour of some ladies, there are other cases in which it fails; for there is a class of men so broken to harness and to the hardships of war, that they cannot adapt themselves to the tender sport, and so give little pleasure to their ladies; many of whom would rather welcome a good practitioner of Venus, all fresh and dapper, than four such broken-winged crows of Mars.

I have known many so disposed; they may be called feminine women. They reason that love is at the best but a pastime, & they want its quintessence without regard to persons. A good fighting man is good, they say, and a fine sight on the field of battle; but what if he is no good in bed? Better a stout lackey in good fettle, than a spent nobleman however brave and handsome! I call to witness those ladies who have made the experiment, and who make it every day; the loins of the gentleman are drained and his blood chilled by hardship, and however gallant he may be on the field, he cannot rise to the tender occasion, as others who have never borne the fatigues of war.

¶ But there are ladies who love fighting men for another reason, choosing them as husbands or lovers in the belief that these will most bravely champion their honour & their chastity, if either should ever be soiled by the tongue of slander. Among many such that I have known at Court there was a great lady, and very beautiful, whose name I will not give. Being a frequent victim of slander, she turned away a very favourite lover of hers, because she saw him slow to strike and in general not truculent enough in her behalf; and in his place she took a mettlesome fellow, who would carry his lady's honour at his sword's point, where none should dare to touch it.

I have seen this to be a common desire in ladies, to have always a man of valour for their escort, and indeed they have often need of such; but this gives their lovers a certain dominion over them, & the ladies must beware not to be caught in any fickleness. For if the hot-tempered defender

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but suspect their too gracious ways, he will give a terrible time both to them and to their flirts; of which I have seen many cases in my life. In short the ladies cannot have it both ways at once; if they want the luxury of a brave champion, they themselves must be no less constant to him, unless, indeed, they can make a safe secret of their intrigues. They will be fortunate if they can come to some such arrangement as the courtesans of Rome and Italy, who have a *bravo* (as they call him) for their defence, but always make it part of the bargain that they shall have other connexions, without the *bravo* murmuring.

¶ But no! that may be all very well for the courtesans of Rome and their *bravos*, it will not do for the gallant gentlemen of France and of like countries. If an honourable lady is going to be firm in constancy, then her lover must not spare his life in her defence; he must see that she does not run the least risk in the world, whether it be to her person, or to her honour through some malicious word. Thus I have seen many at our Court shut the mouths of slanderers, who had ventured to slight their mistresses. Indeed we are bound by the laws of chivalry to be our ladies' champions in all their troubles: so did the brave Renaud for the fair Genevra in Scotland, and the Señor of Mendoza for that fair Duchess I spoke of, and, in the time of Charles VI, so did the Lord of Carouge for his own wife, as we read in our old chronicles; and I could quote any number of others, not only from books but from my own experience of our Court, only I should never be done.

¶ I have known ladies to quit the wealthiest of lovers because they found them pusillanimous, & to take and marry gentlemen whose only fortune (so to speak) was their cloak & sword; but they were brave & generous, and there was hope that by their valour they would win to great estate. It is true that such prizes do not always go to the valiant, however well they deserve them, but one often sees them carried off by cowards: never mind, such merchandize never becomes them so well as the brave.

Endless are the reasons why ladies love men of generous heart, I could make a whole book on this subject alone; but as I prefer to amuse myself

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with others many and various, what I have said already on this must suffice. Many will blame me perhaps, declaring this subject so important that no reasoning could be too profuse or examples too multiplied. I hear them saying indignantly, 'He has forgotten this, he has forgotten that!' I know it as well as they do, & perhaps better; for not only could I quote case for case with them, but could tell high secrets they have no knowledge of: and here is my chief reason for saying no more on the subject, there are some confidences which in honour must be kept.

Nevertheless there is one word I must say in conclusion: just as ladies love men to be valiant in war, they love those who shew the same quality in love, and no man who is timid and over-respectful will have success with them. Not that they would have men so rude in attack as to lay them on their backs by brute force; but they desire in them a kind of bold restraint, or shall we call it a restrained boldness? For ladies of their own part, those at least who are not mere whores or bitches, will not solicit a man, nor if he be forward will they altogether abandon themselves; yet they know well how to arouse our passions, and by this means they draw us on so nicely to the skirmish, that one who does not seize the occasion & come to grips, without any respect then for majesty or grandeur, without scruple of conscience or fear on any account, that man (I say) is a poor-spirited loon, who deserves for ever to be thrown over by Fortune. ¶ There were two gentlemen who were comrades, & for them two ladies gave a party one day in Paris (two ladies of no low degree); and all four went for a walk in a garden, each of the ladies separating with the gentleman who was courting her, and taking her own path under a trellis of vines, where the day was almost shut out and the air was pleasantly cool. One of these gentlemen was bold and knowing, and did not suppose that he had been asked here to enjoy the air, or that the flushed face of his lady came from a desire for the grapes growing overhead, her words were becoming also more giddy and reckless, and he decided that this was an occasion not to be lost. Suddenly seizing her without ceremony, he laid her on a little bed of grassy turves; and there he enjoyed her very sweetly,

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while she only gasped out: 'My God! what do you want? what a strange mad creature you are! Suppose anyone were to come! my God! will you take yourself off?' But the gentleman calmly went on with the business, and had such good satisfaction, and she also, that when they had arisen and taken two or three turns up and down the path, they sought their couch again for another bout; then, leaving the place and coming out on an open path, they caught sight of the other gentleman and his lady, promenading just as they had left them. Whereon the happy lady said to the happy gentleman: 'We shall find (I think) that your friend has acted the fool, & has entertained his lady to nothing better than conversation.'

So, when all four had assembled, the ladies went off to exchange confidences; and the happy one answered the other that her luck had been very good, and for once she had nothing in the world to complain of. But the unhappy lady said, that for her part she had got hold of such a lump of a lover, she did not know whether he was more coward or fool; meanwhile the two gentlemen saw them laughing together, and amid their exclamations caught these words, 'Oh! defend me from Mr. Respectful' Then the happy gentleman remarked to his companion, 'I'll engage, 'tis you our ladies are talking of, and fairly castigating you moreover; you will find that your respect is only taken for prudery.' The other could only agree & curse himself; but the hour had slipped by, & time had no longer a forelock to be taken by. However he bore his fault in mind, & when a chance came to him some while after, I could tell a good story of the amends he made.

¶ This reminds me of two great lords of my acquaintance, who were brothers, & both highly accomplished; they loved two ladies, of whom one was of much lower rank than the other, in fact served her as lady of the chamber. So the brothers came together into the chamber of the great lady, who for the time was keeping her bed; and each was able to court his own lady apart. The lover of the great one was paying her every respect, humbly bending over her hand and making courteous speeches, without the least sign of an advance or any wish to storm the breach.

Meanwhile the other, without ceremony or so much as a word spoken, took his lady round a corner into a window; and swiftly thrusting his hand under her skirts, tore open her drawers by force; shewing her at once that he was no Spanish lover, working by sighs & glances & melting words, but one who went straight to the point, & saw no other object in true lovers' coming together. Having carried off the prize he was leaving the room, but said over his shoulder to his brother, in the great lady's hearing: 'Brother, do as I, or you will have done nothing; no matter how bold you are elsewhere, I tell you that your honour is gone, unless you shew boldness here: you are not here for a trial of respect; see your lady as a city expecting the assault!' So he left his brother to it; who even now held his fire, putting off the action to another day; and the lady for his coldness thought only the less of him, wondering whether cowardice was the cause or impotence. Yet he was a man who at other times was forward enough, and that in love as well as war.

¶ Once the late Queen-mother had a very pretty Italian comedy played, the invention of Cornelio Fiasco, a captain of galleys; it was in the *Hôtel de Reims*, at Paris on a Shrove-Tuesday, and all the Court were present, both men and women, as well as many citizens. Among other characters of the piece there was a young man, who had remained hidden all one night in the bed-room of a beautiful lady, and had never touched her. When he relates the adventure to a friend, *C'h'avete fatto?* what did you do? says he. The young man answers, *Niente*; nothing; whereupon his friend bursts out, *Ab poltronazzo, senza cuore! non havete fatto niente?* Poltroon! you did nothing? *Che maldita sia la tua poltronneria!* Cursed be your poltroonery! In the evening, when the comedy was finished, and we were gathered in the Queen's chamber discussing it, I asked a fair and honest lady (who shall be nameless) what she thought the best passages in the piece; & she answered with perfect simplicity: 'The best passage to my mind is that in which the young man called Lucio tells *che non havete fatto niente*; & his friend answers, *Ab poltronazzo! non havete fatto niente? che maldita sia la tua poltronneria!*' So the lady agreed (you see) with

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the fellow in the comedy, & thought nothing of his friend who was such a timid booby; and this was the beginning for her and me of some more open talks, on how men are to blame for missing their chances, by not watching the wind as the good marriner, and freeing the sheet when it blows in their favour.

¶ There is a rather saucy story that I must tell now, though it hardly fits with the seriousness of my theme. It was told to me by an honourable gentleman, a friend of mine, of a lady of his country; who had been in the habit of granting certain intimate favours to her lackey; indeed they had only stopped short of what now happened. One morning the lackey came into her room in the course of his duties, who (as you may believe) was a game lad, with his wits about him; & what should he see this morning of summer, but the fair form of his mistress stretched naked on the bed, herself sleeping and not even turned towards the wall. The temptation of such beauty was more than he could resist, nor did our lackey try, especially as the posture was so convenient for him to invest the lady; he came softly up to the bed, and on to it, and very neatly he made his way to her Fancy. The lady then opening her eyes, saw that it was the lackey her mind was set on; then all impaled as she was and pressed by her lover, but without making any attempt to put him off or to uncouple, rather holding herself still for fear of losing anything, she said to him with a haughty stare: 'My good fool! what have you been so bold as to put there?' —The lackey answered her with proper respect: 'Excuse me, Madam, shall I take it away?' —'That is not what I said to you, my good fool,' answered the lady, 'I asked what you have been so bold as to put there.' —But the other only repeated, 'Excuse me, Madam, shall I take it away?' —Then she in turn repeated, 'My good fool! what have you been so bold as to put there?' And so the two of them went on, with a seriousness that only added relish to their pleasure, until desire was satisfied; & the lady felt all the better for avoiding the question, which, coming from her lackey, she could only have answered one way. 'Twas a happy thought to persist in her first question, and as for the lackey, he was no less wise to enter into

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the game; which often after was renewed in the same happy conditions, the alternate questions being observed as a solemn rubric; for as the old proverb says, 'tis only of the first bottle that you count the cost. There was a lackey for you good & bold. To such adventurers we must say with the Italians, a *bravo cazzo mai non manca favor*, a brave cock never wants favour.

Thus we see, that while some are brave alike in love and war, others are brave in war only, and others again in love only; a famous example of the last being that rascal Paris, who was bold enough to ravish Helen and make a cuckold of poor Menelaus; aye, bold enough to go to bed with the lady, but not to meet her lord in arms before *Troy*.

¶ As to the reason why ladies love not old men, nor those who have aged before their time, so as to be timid in love and shy of asking; it is not that these lack the desires of youth, 'twere better if they did, for they lack the potency. Which reminds me of what a Spanish lady once said; that old men are like persons gaping at the splendour and dignity of a King, but much as they envy him, never making any attempt to dispossess him & enter into his Kingdom. She also said, *Y a penas es nacido el deseo, quando se muere luego*; hardly is desire born when it dies. And of old men not daring to seize the object that attracts them, she said it was *porque los viejos naturalmente son temerosos; y amor y temor no se caben en un saco*—because old men are naturally timid; and love and fear do not travel well in one bag. Natural indeed is their timidity; when they lack the weapons of offence and defence, which the young have in youth and beauty; so that a poet could say, that no act whatever is unbecoming in youth; and again another that there are two sorry sights, an old soldier and an old lover.

¶ Enough has now been said on the subject of my Discourse, & I would make an end here, but there remains the reverse side, as stated in the heading; namely the love of men for a certain courage in ladies, corresponding to the love of ladies for brave and generous men. If I say that courage in ladies is no less attractive than in men, I do not mean that my

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lady must bear arms, and perform the exploits of men; 'though I have known some & heard tell of others, who went on horse-back with pistol in holster, and (what is more) knew well how to use their weapons; there was one I could name during the wars of the League. But such disguising is a denial of sex; and, besides being neither beautiful nor becoming, it may prejudice a lady more than she thinks, and so is rightly forbidden. See the harm it did the gentle maid of *Orleans*, who at her trial suffered much calumny on this account, so that it was a chief cause of her death; that is why I cannot approve of such mannish behaviour. But that lady has my love & good wishes who, when she is in adversity, or is threatened by some fate, shews her courage by acts of feminine beauty, bespeaking a man's heart within her; and without borrowing examples from ancient Rome and Sparta, whose women in this quality surpassed all others, I wish to record a few from our own times, where we have plenty under our eyes.

¶ First & in my opinion the most admirable were those ladies of *Sienna*, in the revolt of their city against the intolerable yoke of the Ghibbelines; for after the dispositions had been made for the defence, the women (of course) being placed apart as not qualified for war, these wished to distinguish themselves; they wished to shew that they were fit for more than plodding at their daily tasks, and were desirous of excitement, such as even the night did not bring them with their men. Their idea was to help on the work of a fort that was building, and for this purpose they divided themselves into three companies; then upon S. Anthony's day, in the month of January, three of the most beautiful, who were also of the highest rank, appeared with drums and banners in the great Square; which is itself very beautiful, and must have made a perfect setting. All three ladies were dressed as nymphs in short tunics, which shewed to advantage the curve of leg and thigh; first came Signora Forteguerra all in violet, with banner of the same colour, having these words on it for motto: *Pur che sia il vero*. Next came Signora Piccolomini all in crimson, with a white cross on her crimson banner, and this for motto: *Pur che no*

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l'habbia tutto. And last came Signora Livia Fausta all in white, with a palm on her banner and this for motto: *Pur che l'habbia!*

Round about and in the train of these three, who looked like goddesses, were a good three thousand ladies, drawn both from the nobility and from the town; all were beautiful to see, every lady being dressed according to her rank in robe or livery, so that there were satins & taffettas & damask together; and in the hearts of all was a resolve to live or die for liberty. Each one carried on her shoulder a bundle for the fort, & with one voice they cried *France! France!* whereat the French King's lieutenants, the Cardinal of Ferrara & M. de Termes, were so delighted, that they could not take their eyes off the rare & lovely spectacle, nor find words to praise the beauty and virtue of those ladies; and in truth I have heard from many who were there, both men & women, that never was anything so beautiful seen. God knows, the city of *Sienna* is not wanting in fair ladies; they are the rule there rather than the exception.

The men of themselves had been already inclined for their liberty, but were roused to enthusiasm by this beautiful act, and determined not to be outdone by their women in the cause; there was a race for the fort, lords and gentry jostling with merchants and artisans; even churchmen in their cassocks caught the spirit of emulation, and took pick and shovel with the rest. In the evening all assembled in the Square before the palace of the Signory, the men on the one side & the women in their companies on the other; thence all went in single file to salute the image of the Virgin, the Patron Saint of the town. There was singing of hymns and canticles in her honour, and so sweet was the sound of the voices in unison, that between joy & pity there were tears in all eyes; then, after benediction by the most reverend Cardinal of Ferrara, each went home for the night, man and woman alike resolved to do better for the future.

¶ The solemn performance of these ladies reminds me of another, which (though pagan and not properly to be compared with it, therefore), was yet beautiful in its way. It took place at Rome in the time of the Punic wars, & is described by Livy. There was an ordered procession of thrice

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nine beautiful young ladies, all twenty-seven of them virgins, dressed in robes of a middling length, whereof we are not told the colours; who, having marched to a certain place, there halted and performed before the people a very pretty dance. They had a long ribbon, and forming in single file they threaded it in and out of one another, passing it from the right hand of one to the left of the next behind; & all the time they were dancing round about, the patter of their feet keeping time to a song they sang, which governed also the swaying of their bodies as they passed the ribbon. In truth it must have been a pretty sight, what with the beauty of the maidens and their graceful movements; for nothing is lovelier than the dainty tripping of a maiden's feet, when she knows her steps and has a natural grace.

I have often pictured to myself this figure they danced; it reminds me of one I saw in my youth, danced by the girls in my part of the country, which was called the *Garter*. They would pass garters from hand to hand over their heads until each had one, then twining these in & out of their legs, and leaping nimbly over them, they would free themselves prettily as often as they became entangled. And all the time they were following one another round, without losing the rhythm of the music, whether it was of song or of instrument. Nothing could be prettier to watch, for what with the skipping, the intertwining and getting free again, there was a happy lasciviousness in the management of the garter, which added to the charm of the maidens. So much so, that I wonder this dance has never been taken up at Court in our time; it would give us glimpses of drawers without reproach, and would shew off beautiful legs as they deserve; we should know without doubt who has the neatest shoe, and who the best style generally. But it is a dance that cannot be described, it must be seen to be appreciated.

¶ To return to our Siennese ladies—ah! ladies beautiful and brave, verily you should never have died; but as your glory has, so should you have lived immortal! And the same I say of that noble daughter of your town, who one evening of the siege, seeing her brother sick in bed, and unable

to take his turn on guard, slipped quietly from his side and put on his arms and uniform; and thus appeared at his post, looking the image of her brother; nor was she ever recognised, thanks to the darkness of the night. Surely a noble act! for although she masqueraded as a man and a soldier, it was not as if she made a habit of so doing, she did it upon this one occasion only, to be of service to her brother. It is said that no love equals that between brother & sister; also that in a good cause one should stop at nothing, generously withholding no service, whatever the situation. I expect that the corporal who had this beautiful girl in his squad, when he came to know of it, was vexed enough that he had not recognized her sex; so that he could publish her act for praise, after exempting her from duty that night; not to mention the pleasure he might have had in contemplating her beauty, set off as it would be by the soldierly bearing, which she is sure to have counterfeited most studiously. Surely one cannot praise too highly an act so charming, & done from such a worthy motive as a brother's need.

¶ A like act, though with motive far other, was that of the noble Richardet. It happened one evening, after he had listened to his sister Bramante discoursing of the charms of that fair Princess of Spain, whom she so loved, and burned with desires toward her all hopeless and in vain. He waited till his sister was in bed, then, taking her robe and other gear, he disguised himself so as to be taken for Bramante; which he could easily do, the two being so alike in feature and expression. Under this appearance he won from the Princess that which only nature denied to his sister. But he would have suffered for it greatly (was in danger even of death) had he not been saved by the favour of Roger, whose mistress Bramante was, and who verily took Richardet for her.

¶ I have heard from M. de la Chapelle des Ursins, who gave the late King Henry an account of that beautiful act of the Siennese ladies, having been in Italy at the time, that the King was entirely charmed by it; he swore with tears in his eyes, that if God should one day give him peace or truce with the Emperor, he would sail in his galleys to the Tuscan sea, and

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landing, he would visit *Sienna*. For he wished to see this town that was so loyal to himself and his party, and to express his thanks for its courage and good-will; above all he wished to see those fair and honest ladies and to pay them an especial compliment. And I believe he would have done no less, for he held those ladies in high honour. As it was, he wrote them the most gracious letters of thanks, with offers of recompense; which he addressed chiefly to the three leaders, & these were thereby much pleased and encouraged.

Alas! he had the truce certainly, some time after, but before it came *Sienna* was taken, as I have told elsewhere. It was an inestimable loss to France, to whom this noble ally had been very dear. For the people of this town, remembering & feeling deeply their ancient origin, were ever willing to re-join us, and to take their place in our ranks as of old. Brave Siennese! they are said to be descended from that tribe of Gaul called Senones, of whom we recognize another branch in the people of *Sens*; they have to this day the disposition of us French, are swift in action and lively as we, wearing their hearts on their sleeves in the best sense. Their ladies too are like ours, having that natural graciousness of manner, at once dignified and intimate, that is the peculiar charm of Frenchwomen. ¶ I have read in an old chronicle quoted elsewhere, that King Charles VII on his journey to *Naples*, when he passed through *Sienna*, had a triumphal reception so magnificent that it surpassed any he met with in Italy. The Siennese went so far, in token of their respect and humility, as to take all the gates of the town off their hinges and lay them on the ground; and so long as the King remained in the town they were left so, all entrances being open & unguarded to whomsoever would come or go; only after his departure were the gates put back. I leave you to imagine how touched the King must have been, and all his Court and Army with him; surely he had reason to love and honour this town, as in fact he always did, nor ever could speak too highly of it. *Sienna* for ever! & God bless her brave citizens! Would to God, good Siennese, you were ours in everything, as you seem to be in heart and soul; you would find a King of France a far

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easier overlord than a Duke of Florence—aye, blood is thicker than water! If only we were as near situate as we are remote, who knows but we should be found at one in will and deed?

¶ The chief ladies of *Pavia* likewise, when their town was besieged by King Francis, organized themselves under Countess Hippolita de Malaspina; & following the example of their general set themselves to shoulder baskets, removing earth and repairing breaches to the envy of the soldiers.

¶ Again I saw some ladies of *La Rochelle*, at the siege of their town, matching that act of the Siennese which I have described. I remember well, it was on a first Sunday of Lent; the King's brother, who was our general, had invited M. de la Noue to meet him on parole, that the two generals might hold a parley. This was agreed to, and a truce was made for that day and the next, M. d'Estiozze being given as a hostage to the town. I will only mention in passing what was the purpose of the meeting; it was to enable M. de la Noue to open up those negotiations with which he had been entrusted by the town; the history of these is long & very curious. I hope to give it in another place. To come now to the ladies, the hour the truce began there appeared immediately, as well as our own men clambering out of the trenches, many of the townsfolk on the ramparts and battlements; but most noticeably a hundred ladies, evidently of the nobility and the higher ranks of the citizens. They were all beautiful, and richly attired in fine Holland linen, pure white; which wrapped their heads as well as their bodies and made them a dazzling sight. The reason they were so dressed, we learned, was the work they were doing on the fortifications, removing earth in baskets; & coloured clothes might become dirty without shewing it, but these had to be sent at once to the wash, and so were always clean. Moreover the ladies were more conspicuous in white, so that their good example was not lost to others. We French were ravished by the sight of these fair ladies; many of us, I promise you, asked no better entertainment than to be gazing at them. For their part they were very willing to shew themselves, nor

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grudged us any delight they could give; for they lined the rampart in such graceful poses, that they were well worth looking at and longing for.

We were curious to know what ladies they were, & enquired of some of the enemy; who told us they were a sworn band of associates, who had put on this uniform for work on the fortifications, and for other services to their town. And of a truth they did good service, even to the bearing of arms, in the case of the stronger and more virile of them. I have heard tell of one since, who in memory of her successes with a pike in repelling the enemy, still treasures the weapon as a sacred relic; she would give it to no one, would hardly part with it for any sum of money, so dear she holds it, this pride of her home.

¶ Several old knights commanders of *Rhodes* have related to me (and I have read the same in a book of the time) that when *Rhodes* was besieged by the Sultan Soliman, the fair ladies and maidens of the town had no consideration for their fair complexions and tender bodies, but would take their full share in the pains and fatigues of the siege; often going so far as to back the men in resisting assaults, even the most determined and dangerous, so that knights and soldiers were inspired by their courage. Fair Rhodians! your name and fame are for all time; an ill reward it was that you should come under a barbarous yoke.

¶ In the time of King Francis I the town of *Saint-Riquier* in Picardy was attacked by a Flemish gentleman named Domrin, an ensign of M. du Ru, who had with him a hundred knights, two thousand foot and some artillery; there being in the town no more than a hundred foot, a very small force. *Saint-Riquier* must have fallen but for its ladies, who took arms and manned the walls. Using also stones and boiling water and oil, they bravely repelled the enemy, who made every effort to force an entrance. Further, two of the said ladies captured each a standard of the enemy, & brought them from the wall into the town; thus the besiegers were forced to withdraw from the breach they had made, and finally to abandon the siege altogether. The fame of it spread through all France and Flanders and Burgundy; &, when King Francis was passing that way

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some time after, he expressed a wish to see the ladies, whom he thanked and greatly praised.

¶ The ladies of *Péronne* did likewise when their town was besieged by the Earl of Nassau; they helped the brave soldiers who were defending it, and in their turn won the admiration of the King, who thanked them and greatly praised them. Also the ladies of *Sancerre* were praised for their good services, which were of many kinds, when their town was besieged in the civil wars. And in the wars of the League the ladies of *Vitré* acquitted themselves no less well, when their town was besieged by M. de Mercueur. *Vitré* is known for the beauty of its ladies, who are always very elegantly dressed; yet they spared not their beauty in their desire to shew a manly courage; & in such a cause manly acts are surely as admirable in women as in men.

¶ In ancient times the noble ladies of *Carthage* shewed like virtue, when their husbands & brothers & fathers had to cease shooting at the enemy, for want of strings to their bows; these having been all used up in the hard shooting of so long a siege. The ladies could no longer provide them with hemp or flax or silk, or with any other thread for the making of bow-strings; so they resolved to cut off the long tresses of their golden hair. And having sacrificed this glory of their heads and chief feature of all their beauty, they were as little sparing of their white and delicate hands, in twisting the strands to make cords; thus they furnished weapons to their soldiers. And as to the men, I leave you to imagine what courage and what strength it put into them, whenever they bent their bows or let fly at the enemy, to feel in their hands such lovely tokens of their ladies' faith.

We read in the history of *Naples* that the great captain Sforza, when serving under Queen Joan, was taken prisoner by her husband James. He was closely confined, had already had some touch of the rope's end, and doubtless would soon have lost his head, when his sister Margaret took the field in arms. Acting in person, she had such success, that she took prisoner four chief noblemen of *Naples*; whereupon she warned

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King James, that whatever treatment he gave her brother, the same would be given to these his lords. The King found her argument unanswerable, he had to release Sforza safe and sound. O brave and generous sister, so to rise above the limits of her sex! I know some sisters & kinswomen, who if they had done a like deed on certain occasions, might possibly have saved a brave man of theirs, who perished for want of such loyal aid.

¶ Now I will leave those noble ladies, who have taken to war in groups; let us talk of some single instances. As being the most brilliant example of antiquity, I shall quote Zenobia only, to represent all before our times. After the death of her husband she did not occupy herself (as so many do) in vain regrets, but without wasting time took up the government of the Empire in the name of her children. She made war on the Romans and their then Emperor Aurelian, and for the space of eight years gave them much trouble; it was only when she met the Emperor himself in the field, that she was defeated & led a prisoner into his presence. When Aurelian asked her, How she had the audacity to make war on Emperors? she only answered: 'Ah! I know now that you are an Emperor, since you have conquered me.' He was so gratified by his victory, and counted it such glory to have conquered Zenobia, that he resolved to have a formal Triumph. It was celebrated with all pomp and magnificence, she marching before his chariot, in gorgeous robes and a wealth of pearls and precious stones.

In token of her captivity and enslavement she was hung with chains, both body and limbs, but they were chains of gold and were weighted with great jewels; so heavy indeed was the wealth she carried, that often she was constrained to halt & to hold up the procession while she rested. A great matter surely, and an admirable, that, conquered and prisoner as she was, she could still give the law to her triumphing conqueror, making him stop and wait while she recovered her breath! Great and honourable courtesy it was too in the Emperor, so to allow her to rest and take her time, suffering her weakness instead of pressing & driving her beyond her powers. One hardly knows which to praise the more, the magnanimity of the Emperor or the dignity of the Queen; even though it might be a

pretence of hers, and she not so much weak and weary as desirous of glorifying herself. For it was tempting to shew to the world, that in the evening of her days she could still gather this little sprig of honour, could have my lord the Emperor waiting in her steps and timing his march by hers. Certainly she attracted much attention and admiration, both from men and from women, many of the latter wishing they could resemble so perfect a model; for she was one of the most beautiful of women, according to those who have written of her. Her figure was tall and ample, her carriage most stately, and her flashing eyes as dark as her teeth were white; in addition to these beauties the historians give her a charming expression and a lively wit, a disposition modest and sincere and at need merciful. As befits a military leader, she had a clear voice and good delivery; and so could personally convey to her men her plans and orders, and often would harangue them.

I must say that I think the Emperor shewed her to best advantage, thus gorgeously attired in woman's finery, rather than in her simple costume of war, for sex always tells. We may presume that his reason for thus exhibiting her in his triumph was to give a true impression of her, & one that would make her most pleasing to the people by her perfect beauty; also that the Emperor had sipped of that beauty, & having found it good would sip again. Which is to say, that as he had conquered her in one field, so had he also in another—or if you like, she had conquered him: the meaning is the same, whichever way you put it.

I often wonder, since Zenobia was so beautiful, that the Emperor did not keep her as one of his loves; or else that she did not open & set going (by his permission or the Senate's), a house of love and harlotry, as did Flora. She could have enriched herself and stored up much goods and gear, by the usage of her body and the rocking of her bed; for the greatest in Rome would have come to her shop, even vying with one another for the honour. There is no pleasure in the world so gratifying, it seems to me, as to take one's will of a royal & princely person; I appeal to those who have explored this country, & have known such dealings & delights.

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By such means our Queen Zenobia would have enriched herself out of great men's purses, just as did Floia, who received none of low class in her house. And would it not have been better for her to make this life one of gaiety and magnificence, getting her fill of money and compliments, instead of falling into the extreme of necessity as she did? for she got her living by spinning among common women, and would have died of hunger had not the Senate taken pity on her. In view of her past greatness a pension was voted to her for life, with a small property in land, which long after was still known as Zenobia's Lands. Indeed poverty is a great evil; and whoever can avoid it, no matter what means he may choose to transform himself, that person does well; so someone I could mention used to say.

So you see how Zenobia failed to carry her courage to the end of her career, as she should have done; for in all situations we should persist always. It is said that she had a triumphal chariot made, for the purpose (as she boasted in the days of her prosperity) of entering Rome in triumph; aye, she had the presumption to think of conquering the Roman Empire. It was the most superb chariot ever seen in Rome, but was seen in circumstances very different from what she intended; for when the Emperor defeated her he took it for himself, and (while she walked before it on foot) he had in this chariot of hers a more splendid triumph than if he had conquered a powerful king. Say, I bid you, reader: Is not a victory won over a lady, no matter in what field, always great and glorious?

¶ Augustus desired a like triumph over Cleopatra, but was not successful in the means he took; she put herself out of his reach in good time. The Emperor had no occasion to say to her what Paulus Æmilius said, when his prisoner Perseus implored pity; he answered that it was for Perseus to take measures beforehand, meaning that he should have killed himself.

¶ I have heard that the late King Henry desired nothing so much as to take prisoner the Queen of Hungary, not for the purpose of ill-treating her, though she had given him reason enough by her depredations, but

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for the glory of holding this great Queen prisoner. Also he was curious to see, what her demeanour would be in captivity, and if she would retain the proud courage she shewed at the head of her armies. Ah! is there anything more superb than a great lady, who is at once beautiful & brave? Such was this Queen of Hungary, who delighted in the name given her by the Spanish soldiers: her brother the Emperor they called *el padro de los soldados*, the soldiers' father, & her they called *la madre*, their mother. So Victoria in the days of the ancient Romans, or Victorina as she was sometimes called, was known to her armies as Mother of the Camp.

Certain it is, that when a great and beautiful lady undertakes a command in war, she helps greatly by the inspiration she is to her men; I have seen it in the case of the Queen-mother, who would often join our armies: her coming always gave them courage and assurance. And now her little daughter, the Infanta,⁶ is doing the same in Flanders; riding at the head of her army, and shewing herself all valour to her soldiers. All say, indeed, that but for the Infanta & the charm of her presence, Flanders could hardly have been held. The Queen of Hungary, her great-aunt, never equalled her in beauty; nor presented such a figure of valour and noble grace.

¶ We read in our French histories, what a help was the presence of the noble Countess of Montfort in *Annebon*, when it was besieged. Although her men were courageous, and resisted the assaults as well as any in the world, they were beginning to lose heart and to think of surrender; but when the Countess harangued them, they were so inspired by her brave and beautiful words, that they held out till the longed-for succour came, and so the siege was raised. Even better was an exploit of her own: when the enemy were making a grand assault, & all their forces were engaged, she noticed that their tents were left unguarded; whereupon she sprang on to her horse, and with fifty chosen horsemen made a sally, in which she succeeded in setting fire to the Camp. Charles de Blois, when the alarm was given, supposed that it was the work of traitors; so he immediately called off his men from the attack.

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While we are on the subject of the Countess of Montfort, there is a little story I must tell. During the last wars of the League the Prince of Condé, predecessor of the present Prince, was at *Saint-Jean*; where he sent to Madame de Bourdeille,⁷ a beautiful widow of some forty summers, requiring her to surrender six or seven rich tenants of hers, who had taken refuge in her castle of *Matbas*. She refused flatly, declaring that she would never so treacherously hand over dependents, who had sought safety in her good faith. The Prince then sent her a last warning, that if she did not send the men he had named, he would give her a lesson in obedience. To which Madame de Bourdeille answered—and I can vouch for it, as I was there to give her help—that as he himself knew not how to obey she found it strange his thinking to teach obedience to others; she would obey him, she said, when he obeyed his King. As to his threats, she feared neither bombardment nor long siege. And she would have him to know, that she was descended from the Countess of Montfort; from whom her people had inherited this place, & with it all that lady's courage. Therefore she would hold the place so well that he could never take it, and she would win as much fame now in *Mathas*, as her ancestor the Countess had won in *Annebon*. The Prince thought over her answer carefully, & delayed a few days without threatening her further. Yet I believe, if he had not got his death then, that he would have besieged her. Well, he would have found her prepared, not only with courageous resolve, but also with men & ammunition; so that he would have won no glory there, I believe.

¶ Machiavelli relates, in his book *On War*, how Catherine Countess of *Furly* was besieged in her castle by Cesare Borgia, supported by a French army; & how she held out valorously, but at last was taken. The reason of its fall was that the castle was full of little strongholds, places to fall back upon one after another; so that when Cesare threatened the wall, the defenders under Lord John of Casale abandoned the breach, being tempted by the strongholds in their rear; & through this error Cesare was enabled to force an entrance, & eventually took the place; with the result

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to the brave Countess (says our author) that her reputation for courage suffered by the tactical error, 'though she resisted an army whereto the King of Naples and the Duke of Milan had opened their gates. Yet in Italy she was honoured as she deserved; many songs and ballads being made in her praise, even 'though her resistance ended in disaster. This account is worth the attention of those concerned with the business of fortification, who may have been in the habit of building many strongholds, turrets, bastions, and citadels.

¶ To return to our subject, we have had in the past many Princesses and great ladies in this our France, who gave excellent proofs of their prowess; as for example Paula, daughter of the Earl of Penthievre, who was besieged in *Roye* by the Earl of Charoullois. She shewed herself so brave and great-hearted on this occasion, that when the town was taken, the Earl gave her very good terms and a safe-conduct to *Compiègne*, allowing none to do her any injury; inasmuch as he honoured her greatly for her virtue, though he wished ill to her husband, whom he accused of trying to compass his death by spells, and by certain charms with images and candles.

Then there was Richilda, only daughter and heiress of *Mons* in Hainault, and wife of Baldwin VI, Count of Flanders. She made every effort against Robert of Frizon her brother-in-law, who had been appointed guardian of her children; hoping to deprive him of the administration & have it assigned to herself. And with this aim, assisted by King Philip of France, she hazarded two battles against him. In the first she was taken prisoner, but so also was her enemy Robert, and both were returned by way of exchange. Then he offered her battle again, & she lost the second; losing also her son Arnulphus, and having to flee to *Mons*.

¶ When Ysabel of France, daughter of King Philip the Fair and wife of King Edward II of England, was in bad grace with her husband owing to the malicious reports of Hugh le Despenser, she was obliged to retire to France with her son Edward; but after a while she returned to England with her kinsman the Chevalier of Hainault, and with an army led

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by herself. She succeeded in taking the King her husband prisoner, and delivered him into the hands of certain men, with whom it was arranged that his days should be short. But a like fate soon overtook her also, for on account of her loves with one Lord Mortimer she was confined by her son in a castle, there to waste away her life. She it is whom we have to thank for giving the English a pretext to start the quarrel which proved so disastrous to France. None the less we must admit, that he was an ungrateful son who made her such ill return; forgetting to weigh against her light offence the great benefit he had received. Light indeed I call the offence, since it was a natural and easy step for her, after consorting with soldiers & being accustomed to a bachelor life amid the tents of an army, that she should play the bachelor also amid the bed-curtains: often it is seen to happen so.

¶ A case in point was our Queen Eleanour, Duchess of Guyenne, who accompanied the King her husband over sea on crusade. From consorting so much with soldiers and troopers she became very careless of her honour, even going so far as to have amours with certain Saracens; with the result that the King repudiated her; an act that afterwards cost us dear. Probably she wished to try: Were these good fellows as great champions in covert as in the open; or it may have been simply her nature to love men of valour, one valour attracting another as do all virtues. You will never be far wrong in saying, that virtue, like lightning, strikes wherever it touches.

Queen Eleanour was not the only lady to accompany her husband on crusade; many other Princesses and great ladies in her time, and before it & after it, took the Cross with their husbands; without much crossing of their legs however, which were opened in such good free style, that some remained there for life, while others returned most finished whores. Under cover of visiting the Holy Sepulchre, amid the bustle of war, they were busy with the pleasures of love; proving what I said before, that love & war agree well with one another, so well founded is the sympathy between them. We should judge such ladies by the standards of men,

disregarding all but their valour, which will claim from us love & honour; we should not treat the opposite sex as did the Amazons, who rid themselves of their men, saying that marriage was only slavery for daughters of Mars. Nevertheless they were proud enough to get other men, to give them daughters: 'though their sons they did to death.

In the *Cosmography* of Johannes Nauclerus we read that Tibussa Queen of Bohemia, who made a walled city of *Prague*, abhorred the domination of men; and that in the year of Our Lord 1123, some time after her death, there was one of her maidens of great courage, by name Valasca, who gained over all the women and maids of the country to a bloody project. She gave them such a glowing picture of liberty, and so disgusted them with the yoke of the male, that they killed, each one of them, her man, whether husband or brother or kinsman or neighbour; and so in less than no time they were mistresses of the country. Having taken the arms of their men, they learned to defend themselves so well, becoming both brave and dexterous (after the manner of the Amazons), that they gained several victories over other nations. But there was one Libussa, who had taken as husband a vile man of low condition, by name Primislaus; and through his subtle contrivings they were undone, and all were put to death. It was a divine judgment on their heinous act, which made for the extinction of the human race. Could these ladies not have proved their courage and manly spirit in beautiful acts, without committing such an atrocity? We have seen how plenty of Empresses and Queens and great ladies acted nobly, in the maintenance of their realms or domains, or in other causes. History is full of their acts, without my recording them; for the ambition to dominate and to command lodges in the breasts of women as well as of men; and they are no less greedy of power.

¶ But I am going to name one now who was not so infected, and that was Victoria Colonna, wife of the Marquis of Pescayra. I have read in a Spanish book of the attitude she took, when the Marquis (who hid nothing from her of his most private affairs, either great or small) informed

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her by letter of the good offer made to him by Hieronymo Mouron on behalf of the Pope; who proposed to give the Marquis the Kingdom of Naples, on condition that he entered into league with the Papacy. The Marquis was inclined to entertain the proposal, until Victoria (who was ready with her pen) wrote to him in reply, reminding him of his fearless integrity in old days, which had won him a name surpassing the glory of the greatest Kings of the earth. I will give her very words in her own language: *Non con grandexa de los reynos, de estados ny de hermosos titulos, sino con fé illustre y clara virtud, se alcancava la honra, la qual con loor siempre vivo, legava a los descendientes; y que no havia ningun grado tan alto que no fuesse vencido de una trahicion y mala fé. Que por esto, ningun deseo tenia de ser muger de rey, queriendo antes ser muger de tal capitan, que no solamente en guerra con valorosa mano, mas en paz con gran honra de animo no vencido, havia subido vencer reyes, y grandisimos principes, y capitanes, y darlos a triunfos, y imperiarlos:* which may be translated: That not by the greatness of Kingdoms and states and high-sounding titles, unless virtue and good faith shone forth of them, was honour attained to, such as to pass to our children in ever living praise; for there was no rank so high as not to be lost by treachery or broken faith. Wherefore she had no desire to be wife of a King; rather would she be wife of such a captain as not only in war by a valorous hand but also in peace by the power of an incorruptible mind, had risen to be a conqueror of Kings and of the greatest Princes and captains, to lead them in triumph and to rule over them. This woman spoke out of a great courage & a great virtue, and truth was in her words; for a Kingdom gained by vice is but dishonour, while it is noble indeed to command Kings and Kingdoms by the power of virtue.

¶ Such was the aim of Fulvia, wife (firstly) of Publius Claudius and secondly of Mark Antony; who gave little attention to house-keeping, applying herself to nothing lowlier than affairs of state, until it was said of her that she commanded Emperors. Cleopatra had much wherefor to thank her, being indebted to her for the good discipline and instruction she gave to Mark Antony, in pliant submission to personal laws. And

among men we read of Charles Martel, the great leader of the Franks; who would not take the title of King when it was in his power, because he preferred to make Kings his obedient subjects.

¶ But let us speak of some of our own ladies. In the wars of the League we had Madame de Montpensier,^s sister of the late M. de Guise, who was a great stateswoman, and by the devices of her noble mind as well as by the labour of her body took a large part in the building of the League. After it was well established, she was playing one day at *primero*, a game of cards that she was very fond of; & being told to shuffle the cards well, she answered with meaning, and in the hearing of a large company: 'I have shuffled the cards so well, that they can hardly shuffle or unshuffle themselves any more.'

All would have been well, if her friends had not been killed; yet she was nothing disheartened by the loss, but took in hand to avenge them. When she heard the news in Paris there was no shutting of herself up in her room, no vain regrets such as other women indulge, she went out of the house with her brother's children, & holding them by the hand walked up and down the town, making her lament before the people. Having roused them to pity by her tears and cries, she exhorted all to take arms and rise in protest; let them insult the house and picture of the King, let them deny all loyalty to him, and swear open rebellion! We know how well they responded, and how the murder of King Henry III was the result, as I hope to tell in my life of him; but who were the men or women that went to this extremity, or were guilty of inciting to it, remains a question yet. We may be sure that no sister's heart, who had lost such brothers as Madame de Montpensier, could digest the venom without some impulse to avenge the murder.

I have heard that after she had thus roused the people of Paris, and the city was in a passionate turmoil, she herself left for *Parma*, to ask help of the Prince toward her revenge. On the journey she forced the pace by such long stages, that one day her coach-horses, worn and weary with the going, fairly stuck fast in the mires of Picardy; they could not put

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one foot before another, to go either forward or back. When she was in this plight, there chanced to pass an honourable gentleman of the country, who was a Protestant; & although she was disguised & travelling under another name, he recognized her. Putting out of his mind her activities against the Protestants, & her well-known hatred of them, he approached her very courteously & said: 'Madam, allow me to say that I know you, and am at your service; seeing you are in distress and my house is near, I beg you to come to it, to dry your clothes and rest awhile. I will give you the best accommodation my house affords, nor need you have any fear; for though I am of the religion which you hate, I could not leave you without offering in courtesy, what is indeed a necessity for you.' To this gentle pressure she yielded, & was glad to accept his offer. After he had provided for her needs, he took her two leagues on the road again, though she concealed from him her destination. But in the war which followed, I have heard that she returned the gentleman's courtesy by many others on her own part. Many have wondered how she could trust herself to a Huguenot; but what would you? necessity makes us do many things! Besides she saw him to be a man of honour, and his speech was frank and fair; so she never doubted but that he was moved to an honourable act.

Of different temper was her mother, Madame de Nemours, who was imprisoned after the death of her children; by whose loss she was desolated. For whereas she had been before a lady of calm & gentle disposition, who very rarely lost control of herself, now there was no wild abuse that she would not utter against the King; cursing and execrating His Majesty, and consistently speaking of him as *The Tyrant* (for what will one not say and do, in the passionate grief of a bereavement?) 'Aye,' said she, 'but I will call him so no longer, but rather a good & merciful King, if he do but bring death to me as to my children, and so remove me from the misery I am in, to a place in the blessed realm of God.' After another while, moderating her words & cries, she would only sigh out, 'My children, oh, my children!' always repeating these words amid her beautiful tears, which would have softened a heart of stone.

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Alas! she might well lament such children, brave and virtuous and noble-hearted all; more especially the great Duke of Guise, a worthy firstborn and true paragon of knightly virtues. It was natural for her to love her children, and how much she loved them I once learned from a lady who was high in honour at her Court; she said that Madame de Nemours might have been the happiest Princess in the world for many reasons, but mentioned one as preventing it, namely that she loved her children too fondly. So extravagant was this love, that her own happiness was always troubled by apprehensions of some evil that might befall her children; her whole life was spent in anxiety and alarm. I leave you to imagine what a calamity was the death of these two for her, what bitterness she suffered and what pangs; and after it what were her fears for the other, who was then away in the direction of *Lyons*. She had also to fear for M. de Nemours her husband, though of his imprisonment she knew nothing; nor did she know of his death when it came, as I have told above.

When this lady was taken out of the castle of *Blois*, to be more closely imprisoned in the castle of *Amboise*, as soon as she had passed the door she turned aside, & raised her head towards the portrait of King Louis XIII, her grandfather; whose likeness is engraved there on stone, in the character of a warrior, sitting his horse with a fine grace. Pausing a moment and contemplating it, she said aloud before a great gathering of people, with that noble assurance on her face which never failed her: 'If he who is there shewn forth were now living, he would not allow his granddaughter thus to be led prisoner, or treated in such wise.' Then she walked on without another word; but we may well imagine that in her heart she was invoking the ghost of this noble ancestor, to avenge her unjust imprisonment. In which she would only be doing as the conspirators when they waited for Cæsar; for as the moment drew near for them to strike the blow, some of them turned to the statue of Pompey, & dumbly invoked his shade; beseeching it to lend that hand so valiant of old, toward the success of their enterprize. It may well be that the invocation of this Princess was effective, in hastening the death of the King who treated

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her thus tyrannically; for a great-hearted lady nursing revenge is much to be feared.

I remember, when her first husband M. de Guise received his death-blow, she was in camp at the time, having come to see him a few days before. When he came wounded into his quarters, she met him at the door all distraught with grief, & (having kissed him) cried out suddenly: 'Is it possible that the wretch who dealt this blow, and the instigator thereof (for she suspected the Admiral), are to go unpunished? God! if thou art indeed a just God, avenge this crime; for if thou fail me...' She did not finish the sentence, & her husband replied: 'My love, offend not God by your words. If 'twas he that sent this upon me for my misdeeds, his will be done, and glory be to his name. But if it comes from others, vengeance is his alone, & he needs neither your reminder nor your help.' Yet when her husband was dead, she worked to such good purpose that the murderer was torn to pieces by four horses; & the supposed instigator was assassinated some years later. This latter was the result (as I know well, and hope to tell in its proper place) of the training she gave her son; for she nourished him on counsels of vengeance from his tender childhood, nor ceased till the crime was paid for in full.

¶ In this way the counsels and exhortations of noble mothers and wives have great power. I am reminded of the case of the Baron de Bournazel, which occurred when King Charles IX was at *Bordeaux*, on a tour of his Kingdom. This brave and honourable Gascon was imprisoned for killing another gentleman of that country, called La Tour; it being alleged that he used very treacherous means. The widow was so active to procure the punishment of M. de Bournazel, that we took care on his behalf to pass the word in the royal chamber, that he was in immediate danger of losing his head: with the result that ladies and gentlemen alike were suddenly perturbed, & all worked hard to save his life. Twice the King & Queen were petitioned to exercise their clemency; but each time the Chancellor strongly opposed it, saying that justice must be done. The King himself was favourably disposed, for he was young & the Baron one of the gallants

of his Court; indeed he wanted nothing better than to save him, and was further encouraged thereto by M. de Cipierre. Meanwhile the hour of execution approached, to the horror of us all. It was then that M. de Nemours intervened, for he loved the unfortunate Baron, who had supported him well on many a hard-fought field. M. de Nemours threw himself at the feet of the Queen, and implored her to grant this poor gentleman his life, praying and importuning her till she was won over. Without delay a captain of the guard was despatched to the prison, who found the Baron being actually led out to execution, and so was just in time to reprieve him. Thus his life was saved indeed, but in such an hour of terror that never did the expression of it leave his face, nor his colour return after. I have seen a like effect, and others tell me they have observed it too, in M. de Saint-Vallier, who had a like narrow escape through the good influence of M. de Bourbon.

But the widow of the Baron's victim was not to be so put off; next day she met the King as he was going to mass, and threw herself at his feet. Presenting her child, who was some three or four years old, she said to the King: 'I beseech you at the least, Sire, as you have granted grace to the murderer of this child's father, to grant the same now to the child for the time when he shall be grown up, & in just vengeance shall have killed that villain.' From that day, so I have heard, the mother as she woke her child every morning shewed him the blood-stained shirt in which his father had got his death; saying to him three times, 'Take care that you forget not, when you shall be grown up, to avenge this; for if you fail, I disinherit you.' What enduring passion!

¶ When I was in Spain I heard a tale of Antonio Roques, renowned as one of the bravest, and cleverest, and withal most courteous bandits, that ever were in Spain. His first choice of a profession was the priesthood, and the day had come for him to sing his first mass; but as he was leaving the vestry and proceeding in great pomp to the high altar of his parish church, attired in all the vestments of his office and having the chalice in his hand, he heard his mother's voice saying as he passed: *Ah! vellaco,*

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vellaco, mejor sería de vengar la muerte de tu padre, que de cantar misa! Ah villain, villain! better were it to avenge the murder of your father, than be singing mass! The voice and the words so touched his heart that he turned round coldly in mid-progress, and disappeared into the vestry; there he threw off the vestments, letting it be thought that his nerve had failed him, and he must wait for another time. What he did was to join the bandits in the mountains; where he won their admiration and made such a name for himself that in time he was elected chief. He committed many crimes & robberies, & among other deeds he avenged his father; who was said by some to have been killed by a rival, but by others to have been a victim of the law. I heard the story from one of the very bandits who served in Antonio's troop at that time; he praised his leader to the skies, telling how the Emperor Charles could never lay a hand on him. ¶ To return once more to Madame de Nemours, the King kept her but a short while in prison, and of this M. d'Escars was partly the cause. She was released that the King might send her to Paris, where she was to deliver a message of peace to her husband M. de Nemours, to her son M. du Mayne and to other princes of the League; and tell them that the past was to be forgotten, bygones be bygones and all friends as before. The King was content to exact an oath from her that she would be his ambassador in this. When Madame de Nemours arrived, at first nothing passed between the family but lamentations and regrets for their loss; but when she came to deliver her message, M. du Mayne asked her by way of answer, if this was her own counsel to him. To which she said no more than this: 'My son, I have not come here to give you counsel, but only to repeat what was entrusted to me; it is for you to consider, if you would be justified in accepting these offers. All I say is this, that your heart and conscience ought to give you good counsel, as for me, I have fulfilled what I promised.' Thus by suggestion she knew how to stir the fire which was kindled so long before.

Many persons have wondered greatly how the King, who was so wise in the management of his Kingdom, could employ this lady in such an

office; seeing he had so offended her that she could not possibly have her heart in his service, but would only mock him, as in fact she did. His fine counsellor is said to have been the Marshal de Rhets, who was likewise the cause of his sending M. de la Noue to *La Rochelle*, to win the inhabitants to peace and dutiful obedience. This ambassador was actually authorized, as a means of winning first the people's confidence, to work up enthusiasm against his King and theirs; he was to appear as leader of a people's party, and to advocate war to the bitter end! The only condition laid on him was that whenever he should receive a summons from the King, or from the King's brother his lieutenant-general, he should return as bidden. M. de la Noue kept both the terms of the covenant, he stirred up war in the country & then left it; but he had succeeded so well in militarizing the people, and had inspired them with such courage and assurance, that in the outcome they fairly trimmed our beard. Many judged that there was no subtlety in all this; I have heard both sides of the case, & hope to give a full account elsewhere. But see what this good Marshal cost his King and France; he was rather charlatan and quack, than good counsellor and Marshal of France.

A last word now on my lady of Nemours. I have heard that as soon as the League was established, she was looking over the documents and the lists of town that had joined; and when she did not see Paris among them yet, she kept saying to her son: 'All this is nothing, Son; we must have Paris. Until you get it you have done nothing; therefore let us see that we get Paris.' Nothing but Paris sounded from her mouth; and the result was afterwards—the barricades.

¶ This shews how a noble heart always aims too high: which reminds me of a little story I once read in a Spanish tale entitled *La Conquista de Navarra*. This Kingdom had been taken from King John by the King of Aragon, a usurper; whereupon King Louis XII sent an army under M. de La Palice, to re-conquer it. Our King advised the Queen of Navarre, Donna Catherine, through M. de La Palice as his ambassador, to come to the Court of France and stay there with Queen Anne his wife;

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the while the King her husband, with the help M. de La Palice, should be engaged in recovering the Kingdom. The Queen gave a high-spirited answer: 'What, Sir!' she cried to the general, 'I thought the King your master had sent you hither to conduct me into my Kingdom, to set me again in *Pampeluna*; & I was ready to accompany you, ready & resolute for all. And now? you invite me to go and wait at the Court of France! 'Tis poor hope for me, an ill-omened beginning; I see that I shall never enter my Kingdom!' And even as she foreboded, so it fell out.

In the same way the Duchess of Valentinois, when King Henry's health was so bad that his life was despaired of, was urged to retire to her Paris house and to enter his room no more; so as not to disturb his meditations on God (for one reason) but also so as to avoid the enmity of certain persons. When she had retired accordingly, a messenger was sent to demand certain rings and jewels belonging to the Crown; and these it was her duty to return. But suddenly she demanded of the messenger, 'What! is the King dead?' 'No, Madam,' he answered, 'but His Majesty cannot last long.' 'So long as life remains in one finger of him,' said she, 'I wish my enemies to know that I fear them not, and that I shall not obey them; for my courage is still invincible. When the King shall be dead, I have no wish to live after him; then all the bitterness they can give me to know will be but sweetness, compared to my loss. So whether my King be living or dead, I fear not my enemies at all.'

This lady shewed great nobility of heart; though some will object, that she died not after the King, as she declared she would. Well, she failed not to come very nigh to death, and that more than once; but she did better to live, so as to shew her enemies that she feared them not. Having seen them of old, quaking before her & humiliating themselves, she had no wish to do the same now that she was in their place, but to shew so bold a spirit & a face, that they should never dare to wreak their spite on her. And the best of it was, that within two years she was being more sought after than ever, and was gaining friends every day, as I myself witnessed. Such is the way of great gentlemen and ladies, there is

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little endurance in their friendships, & their differences are lightly settled; like thieves at a fair, they love & they hate one another at the same time. With us smaller folk it is different, for either we must fight and get our revenges or our deaths, or else we must come to formal reconciliations, on terms well sifted and defined: nor would we have it otherwise.

Yet one cannot but admire the success of this Duchess; seeing it more often happens when great ladies dabble in affairs of State, that they become too big for their boots, & are always shewing the rest of the world how things should be done. That is why the late King Henry III (predecessor of the present King) and the Queen his mother, had little love for those ladies of their Court, who with idle minds poked their noses into affairs of State; making it their business to discuss them, even affairs touching the Royal House. Said Their Majesties, 'twas as if they were partners in the Kingdom, and ought perhaps to be heirs; as if they had given the sweat of their bodies (as men do) or ever lent a hand to the maintaining of that Kingdom? No, their services consist in giving themselves a good time; chatting in chimney-corners, or much at ease on their chairs and couches, nicely propped up with pillows: thus they will hold forth on the state of the world and of France, as if they were the doers of all.

But I remember a good reply made once by a lady of fashion (whose name I will not give), who had broken forth into a long harangue at the first meeting of the *Estates at Blois*, and received from Their Majesties a light reprimand: That she should attend to her house-keeping and her prayers, to which she replied (being always somewhat too free with her tongue): 'In the days when Princes and Kings and great lords took the Cross, and went over seas to do great exploits in the Holy Land, certainly all that women were allowed to do was to pray and fast and take vows, that God might grant safe return to their men; but as we women to-day see you doing no more than ourselves, we have a right to a voice in everything. Why should we pray God for you, when you do no better than we?' There is no denying that this speech was too audacious by a long way; and in fact it came near to costing her dear. She had to ask pardon

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humbly, and had great difficulty in obtaining it; indeed 'twas only for a certain reason, which I could tell if I would, that a most crushing punishment was not inflicted.

Such witty sayings are not always seasonable, when they come to our lips. I have known others beside this lady who were not able to keep them back; such persons are more restive than a Barbary steed when a smart word comes to their tongue, and must spit it out without regard to kinsfolk or friends or Great Persons. I knew many of this disposition at Court; we used to call them My Lord or My Lady Quick-wit; and thereby they would manage oftener to keep a watch on their tongues.

¶ Now, as I have illustrated the nobility of some ladies by acts of their lifetime, I will describe a few ladies as they have shewn themselves in the hour of death. Without borrowing any examples from antiquity, I will begin with the late Queen-regent, mother of the great King Francis. She was in her day, as I have heard from many ladies & gentlemen who knew her, a very beautiful woman; & a very stylish too, even into her declining years. So much so, that she hated any mention of death in her presence, even if it was a preacher that brought it into his sermon. 'As if we did not all know well enough,' she would say, 'that we must all die some day! When a preacher has come to the end of his lesson, like a poor school-boy, & is at loss for something to say, then he must needs concern himself about this thing death.' And her daughter, the Queen of Navarre, had no more love than her mother for these mortuary songs and predictions.

When the Queen at last was face to face with destiny, as she lay in her bed three days before her death, she saw in the night-time her room all lit up by a beam, striking through the window-pane; whereat she impatiently asked the chamber-women sitting up with her, why they had made up so bright a fire. They answered that there was only a small fire, and that it was the moon which was shining so and lighting the room. 'What next?' she cried, 'the moon is in its last quarter, it has no right to be shining at this hour.' Then ordering them sharply to draw back the curtain, she got a view of a comet, that was shining directly on the bed.

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‘Ha!’ she said, ‘there is a sign that appears not for persons of low quality; God only sends it for great gentlemen & ladies. Cover the window again; the comet announces my death, so I must prepare for it.’ The next morning she sent for her confessor, and went through all the duties of a good Christian; even though the physicians assured her that she was not dying. ‘I should believe you,’ she said, ‘for I feel not so low, but I have seen the sign of my death;’ & she related to them the apparition of her comet. At the end of three days, leaving all thoughts of the world, she passed away.

I cannot believe but that great ladies, who are also young & beautiful, feel more regrets in leaving the world than do others less fortunate; for all that I am going to mention some who were not deterred, but faced death voluntarily, bitter & hateful as his coming must have been to them. ¶ Hear what was said by the late Countess of Rochefoucault, of the house of Roye, in my opinion & in that of others one of the most beautiful and charming ladies in France, when her minister (for she was a Protestant, as everyone knows) warned her that she must think no more of the world, for her hour had come. Now must she go to God who called her, he said, and leave all worldliness, which was as nothing compared with the blessing of Heaven; to which the Countess replied, ‘That may do, good minister, to tell those who have no great happiness here, when they are on the brink of the gulf; but to me, who am in the spring of my life and beauty, with all this world’s pleasures before me, your consolation brings only bitterness. But inasmuch as I have more reason in this world to love my being than I could have in any other, & to shrink from death, I wish to prove to you now my stout heart; be assured that I receive death with as much goodwill as ever did the most vile, hideous and abject hag in the world.’

¶ Then there was Madame d’Espernon, of the house of Candale, who was attacked by so rapid an illness, that in less than six or seven days she was carried off. Before her death she tried every means for a cure, imploring the help of all her friends and servants, and appealing to God with most devout prayers; for her spirit rebelled against dying at such an

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early age. But when she was convinced that there was no longer any hope of a cure, and that she must in very deed go to her God, 'It is true!' she said, 'then let me prepare, I mean to face it bravely.' These were her very words; then raising her beautiful white arms and bringing her palms together on her breast, she lay patiently waiting for death, with an assured heart and a calm countenance. And as she turned her thoughts from the world, she began to abhor it, and to utter most Christian sentiments. So she died most devoutly; being aged but twenty-six years, and one of the most beautiful and charming ladies of her time.

¶ It is said to be unbecoming to praise one's own, but at the same time true virtue ought not to be concealed; and it is for this reason that I wish here to praise Madame d'Aubeterre,⁹ my niece and daughter of my elder brother. Those who have seen her at Court or elsewhere will bear me out in saying, that she was one of the most beautiful and accomplished ladies one could see, excellent alike in mind and body. She had a good figure and features, a pleasant expression and a manner full of grace; at the same time she was learned and had a brilliant wit, which was enhanced by a good delivery free from all affectation; for the words seemed to flow from her lips with a happy ease, no less in a serious discourse than in the lightest tale. I never saw a woman who in my opinion so resembled our Queen Margaret of France, whether in nature or in accomplishments; and once I heard the Queen-mother say the same. Need I give her higher praise? I will say no more of my niece, nor have I any fear that those who have seen her will give the lie to my praises.

Alas! she was suddenly attacked by an illness, which baffled the physicians and exhausted their stock of Latin; her own belief was that she was poisoned. I will not say on what quarter suspicion fell; God will avenge all, and man perhaps too in this case. The poor lady did all she could to find a cure, not that she cared for death, as she herself said; for since the loss of her husband she had lost that fear, though he was by no means a match for her, and deserved neither her company in life nor the tears which poured from her beautiful eyes at his death; but she desired to live

a little longer for love of her daughter, whom she had to leave a tender child. This was a good reason and a beautiful, not like her regrets for a stupid and bad-tempered husband, which were vain and trivial. Two days before her death, when she saw that there was no remedy, having herself felt her pulse and found it to be galloping (for she understood all such matters), she sent for her daughter and gave her very beautiful advice; no mother that I know of could have better presented the truths of this world and of the next, or shown better how to win success together with God's grace. Finally she gave the little girl her blessing, bidding her not to disturb with her tears the happy rest, which her mother was going to have with God.

When the child was gone she asked for her mirror, & looking fixedly at her reflexion she said: 'Ah traitor to my illness, thou face which hast not changed!'—for its appearance was as beautiful as ever—'lo! death is coming, who will shew you up, leaving you all rotten and the food of worms!' At the same time she put on most of her rings; & having gazed at them awhile, and at the beauty which her hand still retained, 'There,' she said, 'is an elegance that once I loved, but at this hour I put it from me with a good heart, that I may adorn myself in the next world with ornaments more beautiful.' Then seeing that her sisters were crying their hearts out beside her, she tried to console them, praying them to receive gladly what it had pleased God to send. As they had loved one another so well, she said, what brought joy and happiness to her should not be a grief to them; the love she had always borne them would endure eternally, as she hoped that theirs would, both to herself and to her daughter. Seeing that they kept back their tears with difficulty, she said to them again, 'Sisters, if you love me why do you not rejoice with me over the exchange, which I am making of a miserable life for a most happy? My soul is weary of its many labours, and longs to put off its bonds and be at rest with Jesus my Saviour; while you would keep it fast to this wretched body, which is but its prison & never its home. I beg you, Sisters, trouble yourselves no more.

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I must pass over many other sayings of hers, so beautiful & Christian, that no doctor however great could surpass them. She asked especially to see Madame de Bourdeille her mother, begging her sisters to send for her and saying to them often: 'My God! is Madame de Bourdeille never coming, Sisters? How long your couriers are gone! they are hardly express travellers, hardly fliers on the road!' Her mother came, but not in time to see her alive, for Madame d'Aubeterre had died an hour before. Me she asked for also, whom she called always her dear uncle; and with her last breath she sent us a farewell.

She requested that her body should be opened after death, though she had always had a horror of this; the reasons she gave to her sisters being, that when the cause of her death was found for certain, it might be the means of preserving her daughter's life and their own. 'For I must confess,' she said, 'that I suspect I have been given poison these five years past, together with my uncle of Brantôme & my sister the Countess of Durtal; only 'twas I who received the largest portion. Not that I wish to charge anyone, for fear of charging my soul in case the suspicion were false: my soul I desire to keep without reproach, clean of all rancour and enmity, that sinless it may fly straight to God its Creator.'

I should never be done if I told all; for her speeches were often long, and gave no sign of a tormented body, or of a mind feeble and failing. For example there was a gentleman, a neighbour of hers, who had a ready wit and loved to talk and joke with her: when he visited her in her illness she said to him: 'Ha, my friend! I am beaten this bout, sword-play and word-play alike are over for me; bid me goodbye!'

Her physician and her sisters would have persuaded her to take some cordial for her comfort, but she begged them not to give it to her, for it could only serve now to prolong her suffering and to delay her rest. She prayed them to leave her, & often was heard to say, 'My God! how sweet is death! as who could have believed?' Then little by little, surrendering her faculties quietly, she closed her eyes; without any of the horrid signs of death, which make many hideous at this moment.

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Madame de Bourdeille her mother was not long in following her; for the melancholy that grew on her for the loss of this noble daughter carried her off in eighteen months, after an illness of seven months, now in hopes of a cure and now in despair. From its beginning she said that she would never recover; nor had she any apprehensions of death, never praying God to give her life or health, but only patience in her pain. Above all she prayed that her end might be easy, without struggle & without lingering; and indeed this was granted, for we thought she had but swooned, when her soul left her. So gently did she pass, that there was not even a twitch of hand or foot, much less any hideous look of horror in her face; she just glanced round at us with eyes as beautiful as ever, then closing them she lay as beautiful in death, as she had been in the fulness of life.

Ah! sad was her fate, as is that of all ladies who die in their years of beauty! We can but believe that Heaven, not content with the beautiful lights which from the world's creation have adorned its vault, wishes of the eyes of those ladies to make new stars, to brighten more ways than in life they could.

¶ This last example, and then an end! You of this generation can claim Madame de Balagny,¹⁰ true sister in all ways of the brave Bussi: when Cambrai was besieged, she did all that a brave and generous heart could, to save it from capture. But after exhausting herself in vain with every sort of defence, she saw at last that there was no hope; for the town was in the hands of the enemy, and the citadel would soon go the same way. She was unable to endure the wrench of vacating her principality—yes, her husband and she had themselves declared Prince and Princess of Cambrai and Cambrésis; to the disgust indeed of some nations, who thought the title too presumptuous, seeing they ranked as simple gentlefolk—Pass that; at the prospect of leaving Cambrai her heart broke within her for grief, and she died at the post of honour. Some say that she took her own life, which might be virtue in a pagan, but is not in a Christian. Still one cannot but admire her nobility, especially in that exhortation to her husband at the hour of death, when she said to him: ‘What remains for

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you in life, Balagny, after this your ruin? Will you serve as a spectacle for the world, a butt for men to point the finger at and laugh at your fall from glory? You have known what it is to be raised on high, will you also know the state of wretchedness that I see prepared for you, unless you do now as I? Learn from me to die, and not to wait for scorn and degradation!" It is a great affair, when a woman teaches us both how to live and how to die. Yet he would not be ruled by her nor believe; and at the end of seven or eight months, forgetting the memory of this brave woman, he took as a second wife the sister of Madame de Monceaux. I deny not that she was a fair and honest lady; or that he was an illustration to many of how life after all is life, whatever the conditions may be. Yes, life is good and very sweet; but a noble death is more to be praised, and such was that lady's. But if she died of grief, she is of an opposite nature to most ladies; for they are said to die of joy and in joy, and so to be of opposite natures to men.

¶ I will only give this one tale now of Mademoiselle de Limeuil the elder, "who died at Court, being one of the Queen's maids of honour. During her last illness she was forever talking, truly her tongue never ceased; for in conversation she was very brilliant and amusing, and along with that she was very beautiful. When the hour of her death came, she summoned her lackey, for each of the Court-ladies had one to herself: hers whose name was Julian, was a fine violin-player. 'Julian,' she said, 'take your violin and keep playing me the *Defeat of the Swiss*," till you see me dead, for I am going now; play it your best, & when you come to the words "All is lost," repeat the passage four or five times, as pathetically as you can.' The lackey did as she told him, while she herself joined in with her voice. When she came to 'All is lost,' she sang the words twice; then turning to the other side of the bed, she said to her companions, 'All is lost this time in good earnest!' and so she died. A joyous and spirited death it was! I have the story from two of her companions who assisted at the little drama, and whose word is reliable.

If there are indeed some women who die of joy, or at least die joyously,

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a goodly number of men might be found to have done the same. There was the great Pope Leo, who died of joy & mirth when he saw us French driven out of the State of Milan; so great was the hate he bore us!

¶ The late Grand Prior, M. de Lorraine, once took a fancy to send two of his galleys on an expedition to the Levant, under the command of Captain Beaulieu, one of his lieutenants of whom I speak elsewhere. This Beaulieu went very readily, for he was brave & adventurous. When he was approaching the Archipelago, he met a great Venetian ship, well armed and in every way well found. He opened fire on her at once, but the ship returned his salute to such good purpose, that the first broad-side carried away two of his banks of oars, galley-slaves & all. His lieutenant also was mortally wounded, a good fellow called Captain Panier; who had just time for this one utterance before he died, 'Goodbye to *panniers*, the vintage is gathered!' The jest makes a pleasant story of his death. As for M. de Beaulieu, he had to withdraw from the engagement, for he was no match for this ship.

¶ The first year that King Charles IX was King, at the time of the July edict when he was residing in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, we saw the hanging of a light-fingered lad in that quarter, who had carried off six silver vessels from the kitchen of the Prince of La Roche-sur-Ion. When he was on the ladder, he begged the hangman to give him a little time to speak; which being granted he entered on his oration, protesting to the people that he had been condemned unjustly. Said he, 'I have never practised robbery on the poor, never on the common herd of the destitute, but only on Princes & great persons, who are worse robbers than we & plunder us all the time; and is it not a good deed to take from them in turn, what they have feloniously taken from us?' And so he went on, with more amusing quibbles of the sort, which there is no need to record; until the priest who had mounted the ladder with him turned towards the people, & called out to them as is usual: 'Brothers, this poor criminal commends himself to your prayers; we will say together a Pater-noster and an Ave for him and for his soul, and we will sing a Salve.' But when the people

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would have responded, the said criminal lowered his head, and looking down at the priest began to bellow like a calf, making very good fun of him; then he gave the good father a tip with his foot, and sent him headlong to the bottom of the ladder, such a tumble that his leg was broken. 'Aha, your reverence!' cried the rogue, 'by God, I thought I should shift you! Well, the bold priest has had a drop too!' Then hearing his groans below, he threw back his head with the noose over it and roared with laughter; the same minute, not waiting for the ladder to be knocked away, he took a flying leap into the air. I can tell you, the Court had a good laugh over this performance, although the poor priest was badly hurt. A death that was by no means sad!

¶ The late M. d'Estampes had a fool called Colin, who was very droll. When Colin was dying, M. d'Estampes asked a servant one day how the fool was doing; and he was told, 'Poorly, my Lord; he must be dying, for he will eat nothing.'—'Here!' said M. d'Estampes, who was then at table, 'take him this soup; and tell him I have been told that he will touch nothing, but unless he take something for love of me, I shall never love him more.' The communication was delivered to Colin, who with death between his teeth made answer, 'And who was it that told His Lordship I would touch nothing?' So saying, he began to make snatches at the flies, which were buzzing round him in hundreds, for it was summer-time; and he went on with this game, just as you may see pages and lackeys and other lads doing, until he caught a couple at one swoop. Then bringing his hand to his mouth, & making a comical gesture that can be better imagined than described, he said to the servant: 'Tell His Lordship, this is what I have taken for love of him, and now I am away to the Kingdom of Flies!' With these words the gallant fellow turned over on his side, and so passed away.

In this connection I have heard more than one philosopher say, that many in the hour of death turn their thoughts to those things they have best loved, as wishing to record them; thus gentlemen speak of war and hunting, artisans of their work and so on, each one according to his rank

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or profession saying some last word. And it is true, as one has often seen and still may.

Women on their death-beds too will rake up their past; even whores are no exception. Thus I have heard tell of a lady of some quality, who on her death-bed fairly exulted in spewing out the tale of her loves and chamberings; telling more than the world ever put down to her, though she was suspected of whoring enough. It may be that she was dreaming when she spoke out so; or else that she was impelled to it by truth, which always will out. But why should she not of a free will have unburdened her mind? It is a fact that she was confessed, and with true repentance and a good conscience sought forgiveness; telling all her sins in detail, with marginal notes to ensure that all was clear. But fancy her industry at such a time, as someone said; to go sweeping her conscience clean of such a litter of scandal, without leaving a speck anywhere!

I heard of a lady once, who was very given to dreaming and rambling in her mind, so that she would tell at night whatever she had done in the day; thus she would give herself away to her husband, who took to lying awake, and listening with great attention to her dreams and ramblings. And sooner or later she gave him great ground of offence.

¶ It is not long since a gentleman of fashion, in a province that I will not name, did as the others on his death-bed; publishing his loves and chamberings, & even specifying the ladies, married & unmarried, with whom he had had affairs; aye, & the places & the manner of his meeting them. All this he confessed aloud, asking pardon of God before the world. It was worse than that which the lady did, for she only gave away herself, whereas the gentleman brought scandal on many ladies: but what a fine pair of gallants!

¶ It is said of misers when dying, whether men or women, that their minds have a like tendency to run on their guineas, and that they always talk of their hoards. About forty years ago there was a lady of Mortemar," one of the richest in Poitou both in money and goods; and when she came to die she was thinking only of her guineas, which were locked

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in her closet. Ill as she was she would get up twenty times a day, to go and look at her treasure. At last when she was very near death, and the priest was exhorting her to think of the life eternal, the only answer she gave him was to keep saying, 'Give me my petticoat, the villains are robbing me!' She could think of nothing but to get up and visit her closet; and the poor lady actually died in struggling to do so, when she no longer had the strength.

I have allowed myself at the finish to interweave a few strands, not proper to the subject of this discourse; but I have authority for this in tragedies and moralities, which always end with a farce. And this is my last word.

THE SIXTH DISCOURSE

*Wherein is shewn the Consequence of Evil Speech
concerning Ladies*

TIS A POINT TO NOTE IN REGARD TO FAIR AND honest ladies, who are given to gallantry, that no matter what escapade they may have indulged in, they will not allow that anyone has a right to say a word to their discredit; and if anyone be so rash, they will have their revenge sooner or later. In short, they think they should do what they like, but the rest of us must not say what we like. And they are right! for it is an ugly thing to give away a lady's secret doings, so as to bring scandal on her: she does not please herself only but her lover also, and it should be no one else's concern.

The Courts of our French Kings, some at least and especially those of late years, have been very free in criticising honourable ladies; sometimes there is not a gallant at Court but has some falsehood to tell about them, or if it is true he tells it only for scandal's sake. This is very dishonourable in men; for we should never soil the honour of ladies, especially if they are highly placed. I blame equally those who have had enjoyment of what they denounce, & those who denounce the feast because they may not taste the venison.

The Courts of our recent Kings, as I was saying, have been especially given to this sort of scandalous gossip; it was never so under their predecessors, with the exception of that jolly old reprobate, King Louis XI.¹ It is said that most days he would eat at a common table in open hall, with all sorts of persons, not merely with the noblemen his intimates, who would be mixed with the others; & whoever of this company could tell the best bawdy-tale of loose-living ladies, that person was the most welcome and the best entertained. He himself always had one ready to tell, for he was a great collector of such tales and tried to hear all that were going; which he would then pass on to others, & that in the most public manner. Could there be a greater scandal than this? The fact is, the King had a very low opinion of women, and believed none to be chaste. Once he invited the King of England to Paris to make good cheer with him, but when taken at his word he immediately repented, and invented an alibi to put him off. 'God's Passion!' he cried, 'we don't want him here;

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he would only fall in love with some tricky minx, who would lure him to stay or to come again, until we were tired of him.'

For all that he had a high opinion of his wife,' who was sober and virtuous; & indeed she had need to be, for he was distrustful & suspicious if ever a Prince was, and soon would have sent her the way of the others. When he died, he charged his son to love and honour his mother, but not to be ruled by her; 'not but she is sober and chaste,' said he, 'but she is more Burgundian' than French.' He never made love to her but for the purpose of having issue; and when he had it, he took little account of her. She was kept at the castle of Amboise as a simple lady, allowed neither the state nor the robes of a Queen; thus he left her with her little Court to say her prayers, while he went gadding about & having a good time. I leave you to imagine, when the King had such an opinion of ladies and found his amusement in sneering at them, how their names were bandied about by every gossip at Court. Not that he wished to hurt them by his jokes, still less to correct their morals, as I have seen others try to do, it was simply to please himself that he made game of them. The result was that the women, poor creatures, carried a pack-saddle so loaded with scandal, that often they could not slip off the crupper quite as freely as they would have liked. All the same there was free-love enough in this reign, the King himself with the gentlemen of his Court contributing, both to the practise and to the maintenance of it; for he only wanted to know who could make the best joke of it, whether in public or in private, and who could tell the best story of some lady's lasciviousness, of her wriggles (as he called them) & her general abandonment. It is true that the names of great ladies were not mentioned, and you were left to make what reasonable guesses you could; so I think they had a better time than some I saw in the late King's reign, who were lectured and scolded by him out of measure. Such is the account I have had of our jolly King Louis XI, from some of the older generation.

¶ Of different complexion was his son Charles VIII, who succeeded him; for he is said to have been the most decent King in his speech that

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ever was, never offending man or woman by the least word. So you can imagine what a good time his reign was for ladies, who were fair & loved pleasure. He was their devoted servant, only too much so indeed, for when he returned with glory from his victorious expedition to *Naples*, he took such pleasure in entertaining and making much of the ladies, what with tournaments and combats that he provided for their amusement at *Lyons*, that he forgot all about his possessions at home, losing towns & territory by his neglect; aye, there were castles still holding out which he could have saved had he heeded their appeals for help. It is said too that the ladies were the cause of his death; for wishing to prove his entire abandonment to love, weak man as he was by constitution, he further weakened & enervated himself in their embraces, so that it may well have hastened his end.

¶ King Louis XII' was very respectful to ladies; for as I have told elsewhere, he would pardon all comedians of his Kingdom, as well as scholars and clerks of the palace in their guilds, for anything they might say, provided it did not touch the Queen his wife, her ladies or her maids. For all that he was a jolly companion in his time, & as amorous as other men; what he barred was foul speech, & such indecent boasting as his ancestor Louis d'Orleans was prone to indulge in. By the way that habit cost the Duke his life; for he one day boasted aloud at a banquet, where his cousin Duke John of Burgundy was present, that he had portraits in his closet of the most beautiful ladies whom he had enjoyed casually; & a while after Duke John, whether by chance or intent, went into this closet. The first lady whose portrait met his eyes was his own noble wife, who was held to be the most beautiful woman of the day, namely Margaret, daughter of Albert of Bavaria, also Count of Hainault and of Zealand. Was the husband dumbfounded? you may say that he was! Can you not hear him mutter, 'Ha! now I have him!' But coming out, he gave no sign of the flea which bit him, hiding from everyone the revenge he was nursing; it was over the Regency and the administration of the Kingdom that he chose to pick a quarrel. Making this his apparent grievance, and not his

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wife, he had Louis of Orleans assassinated in Paris at the Barbette gate. About the same time his wife mysteriously died, of poison we may presume; and Juno being out of the way he married secondly the daughter of Louis third Duke of Bourbon.⁵ It is likely that he gained nothing by the exchange; for when men are liable to grow horns, no matter in whose chamber they make their lair, the same growth will appear again. However that may be the Duke in one thing behaved very properly, namely in taking his vengeance without bringing scandal on his wife or himself; which he successfully avoided by dissimulation.

¶ On this subject, I once heard a great captain say that there are three kinds of injury which a wise man will never publish; he will either suffer them in silence or will invent some other ground of offence on which to quarrel & seek revenge; provided (of course) that the affair has not been so clearly witnessed that suppression of it is impossible. The first case is when it is thrown in a man's teeth that he is a cuckold and his wife public property; the second is when he is accused of sodomy & the third when he is accused of shrinking either from obligations on the field of honour or from duty on the field of battle. These three things, said my great captain, cause much scandal when the charge is published; yet men combat the charge in the belief that they can clear themselves, by proving that they have been falsely befouled. The result of publicity is the opposite, for the charge is like stinking matter which the more it is stirred only smells the worse. This is the reason why the best men will shorten sail, so far as their honour allow, till they can plan some new injury to justify the vengeance they take for the old; the later the better is the rule when it is a matter of settling, either in court or by the sword, for injuries of these three kinds. In proof of which I could quote many instances, but they would hamper my discourse and prolong it indefinitely. You have had the case of Duke John; do you see now how wise he was to conceal his horns, dissimulating as he did, till he could find other grounds for revenge on the cousin who had shamed him? Otherwise he would have been mocked, and his name thus passed from mouth to mouth; of which

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the fear, I doubt not, was as near his heart as the desire for revenge, and clever man of the world that he was, led him to behave as he did.

¶ But to return to the point I had reached, King Francis⁶ was a great lover, and though his opinion of ladies was that they were fickle and inconstant, he would not allow them to be spoken ill of in his Court; aye, though he had such opinions as I have elsewhere related, he insisted on ladies being treated with all honour and respect. I have heard that once when he was passing his Lent at *Meudon* near Paris, there was one of his gentlemen-in-waiting called the *Sieur de Brizambourg*,⁷ of Saintogne, who was serving meat, this being his department; when the King, as sometimes happens at Court, commanded him to take the remainder to the ladies of a certain little band which for fear of scandal I will not name. This gentleman said after among his companions & others of the Court, that those ladies were not content to indulge in raw flesh in Lent, but must eat cooked also, and that when their bellies were full. The ladies hearing of it complained at once to the King; who was so enraged that he gave orders to the archers of his household guard, to seize the gentleman & hang him without delay. Luckily the poor gentleman got wind of it through one of his friends and saved himself by a prompt escape. Had he been taken he was surely a hanged man, gentleman & all as he was, so great was the anger of the King on this occasion; who would never have gone back on his word, as all who saw him realized. The King declared aloud (I had the story from a person of honour who was there) that whoever touched the good name of a lady should be hanged without mercy.

¶ A little before this, when Pope Paul Farnese⁸ came to *Nice*, King Francis visited him in state attended by all his lords and ladies; and some of these ladies, not the ugliest either, went to kiss His Holiness' slipper. Whereat a gentleman remarked, that they had gone to beg a dispensation to taste raw flesh without scandal, as much and as often as they might wish. The King got to hear of this; & it was well for the gentleman that he escaped, else he had surely been hanged, both for irreverence to the Pope and for disrespect to the ladies.

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These two gentlemen were not so happy in their witticisms, as was the late M. d'Albanie.⁹ When Pope Clement came to *Marseilles* to marry his niece to M. d'Orleans, there were three widows, fair & honest ladies, who had so pined after their husbands and the pleasures of marriage that they were reduced by grief and the dulness of their lives to a very low state, being thin and weak and truly ill. These begged M. d'Albanie their kinsman, who was high in favour with the Pope, to procure them a dispensation to eat meat in the forbidden season. The Duke promised to do so, & one day sent them a very friendly invitation to the Pope's lodging; at the same time confiding to the King that he was preparing something for his entertainment, & letting him into the joke which is to follow. When the three widows were on their knees before the Pope, M. d'Albanie began the first to speak, mumbling in Italian which the ladies did not understand: 'Holy Father,' said he, 'here are three widows, fair & honest ladies as you see, who out of respect for their husbands' memory and devotion to their children, are unwilling to marry again on any account, for fear of wronging their husbands or their children. But sometimes being assailed by prickings of the flesh, they humbly beseech Your Holiness to be allowed access to men out of wedlock, if & when they shall be so tempted.'—'What!' cried the Pope, 'Cousin, it would be against the commandments of God, which I cannot dispense with.'—'The ladies are before you, Holy Father, if it please you to hear them speak.'—Then one of the three taking up the word, said: 'Holy Father, we begged M. d'Albanie to lay before you a humble petition from us three, pleading our weak and delicate conditions . . .'—'My daughters,' said the Pope, 'what you ask is not in reason, for it would be against the commandments of God.'—Then the widows, little knowing what M. d'Albanie had said to the Pope, replied to him: 'Holy Father, be pleased at least to give us leave for three days in the week, without scandal.'—'What!' cried the Pope again, 'give you leave for *il peccato di lussuria*, the sin of lasciviousness? I should be damning myself; besides, it is not in my power.'—Then the ladies knew that a trick had been played on them, and that it was M.

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d'Albanie's joke; hurriedly they explained to the Pope: 'We were not speaking of that, Holy Father, but only asking leave to eat meat in the forbidden season.'—Thereon the Duke of Albany said to them, 'I thought, Ladies, you meant living flesh.'—The Pope at once understood the joke, and was unable to suppress a smile as he said, 'Cousin, you have put these honest ladies to the blush, the Queen will be angry when she hears of it'—The Queen heard of it, but was not at all put out, finding the tale very pleasant; and the King likewise had a good laugh over it afterwards with the Pope, who had given the ladies his blessing, and sent them away very happy with the indulgence they sought. I have been told the names of the three, Madame de Chateau-Briand¹⁰ or de Canaples, Madame de Chastillon, and the Bailiff's wife of *Caen*, all honourable ladies; the story I got from some of the older generation at Court.

¶ Madame d'Usez," then Madame du Bellay, did even better, the time Pope Paul III came to visit King Francis at *Nice*. From her youth she had always been fond of practical jokes and witty sayings; and now prostrating herself before His Holiness, she begged three things of him. The first was absolution for a sin she had committed as a little girl, when she was maid of honour to the Queen Regent and went by the name of Tallard: one day at her sewing she lost her scissors, & vowed a pilgrimage to St. Allivergot if he would help her to find them. She found the scissors but had not performed her vow to the Saint, not knowing where his holy body lay. The second petition was that he would pardon her for a sin committed when Pope Clement came to *Marseilles*: being still Little Tallard at the time, she had taken one of His Holiness' pillows from his sleeping alcove, and had wiped herself with it before and behind, knowing that His Holiness would afterwards lay there his noble head and face, & that his mouth would kiss it. The third petition was that he would excommunicate the Sieur de Tays, because she loved him and he loved not her; and whoever loves not when he is loved is cursed, and ought to be excommunicated. The Pope was astonished by these requests, and inquired of the King who the lady was; thus he learned of her bantering ways, and

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joined with the King in laughing his fill. I am not surprised that Madame d'Usez has since turned Huguenot, & is an open mocker of the Papacy, seeing that she began so young. But in all her life nothing has been taken amiss from her, such charm she had with all her pranks and witticisms. ¶ Let no one think now, that the great King Francis was so strict and pious in his respect for ladies, that he loved not to hear a good story: provided there was no scandal in them or anything to a lady's dishonour, he both listened to stories and told them himself. But great King as he was and highly privileged, he would not share this privilege with each and everyone. I have heard some relate, how he wished none of the gentlemen of his Court to be without mistresses, and thought them mere strutting fops if they had none. Often he would ask one or another his mistress' name, and would then promise to be her servant and to speak well of her; such good friendly ways he had. Often too, when he saw a gentleman having an argument with his mistress, he would accost him and ask what was the great talk he was having with her; & if he found the gentleman ill disposed, would correct him and teach him better manners.

With his closest friends he never grudged sharing a good story, never kept it to himself as a miser; one such I heard him tell of something that happened to himself, so amusing that he had to relate it. A young lady had come to Court, who not knowing the ropes very well, allowed herself to be easily led by great persons, and especially by this great King; who one day wished to plant his standard (then raised) in her fort. Now she had heard, and was beginning to notice for herself, that whenever one gave anything to the King or took anything from him, one must first kiss the thing, or at least one's hand before touching it; accordingly, if there was no other ceremony now, the lady did not fail in this, but humbly kissed her hand, before taking the King's standard and humbly planting it in her fort. Then she asked in the most matter-of-fact tone, whether the King desired her to behave to him as a chaste and respectable woman, or as a wanton. Never doubt but he asked for the wanton, for in this business she is to be preferred to the modest woman; and he found that this

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lady knew the business in and out, with what comes before and what after. When all was over she made a low bow, and humbly thanked the King for the honour he had done her, of which she was quite unworthy, and would His Majesty be so good as to remember her husband for advancement. I have heard the lady's name, who is nowadays anything but the simpleton she was, being up to every trick. The King did not keep the story to himself, and it came to many ears.

He was very curious to know of the loves of this one & that; especially he liked descriptions of amorous combats, with details of the lady's expression when being ridden, of her position & movements & utterances. How he would laugh over these, often throwing back his head and roaring! But afterwards he would forbid the publication as scandalous, saying that honour decreed secrecy.

¶ King Francis had a good second in the great, the magnificent, the most liberal Cardinal of Lorraine; most liberal I may well call him, with such expenditures and gracious donations as are recorded of him, especially such charity to the poor; in truth he had no equal in his time. He carried ordinarily a great pouch, which his valet, who managed the money for his casual pleasures, never failed to fill each morning with three or four hundred crowns. When he put his hand into the pouch, without counting or calculation. It was a famous word, after begging an alms, he would say, "Cardinal according to his custom," the blind man cried out in Italian, "Lorrena!" Oh, thou art Christ or a good almoner to the poor, he would say; but chiefly in the direction of his bait. For money was not as plentiful as it is now; ladies accordingly had the more need of entertainments that it buys.

I have heard

lived at Court, or a

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newly married lady who was beautiful, the Cardinal would go and greet her; & reasoning it out with her, would say that he wished her to become his pupil. What a tutor! I suspect it was a labour of love to him, even if he had some hard fillies to train. They say that in his time there was hardly a wife or maid at Court, whether of long standing or newly arrived, who was not lured & debauched by his liberality, supported by her own avarice; so few or none left this Court women of virtue. You could see their chests and wardrobes fuller of gowns and petticoats, of gold and silver and of silk, than are those of Queens & great Princesses today. I speak as an eye-witness, for I have seen such wealth in the possession of two or three, who can only have acquired it front to front, the amount being beyond the means of their parents or husbands.

I might well have had more regard, some will say, for his very reverend state and the honour of the red hat, than to tell this of the great Cardinal: but it was his King's will and pleasure that the Cardinal should so act. To do our King's pleasure we have dispensation for everything, for free-love or whatever else it may be, provided only it do harm to none. In this case it meant going to the wars & to the chase, attending dances & masquerades, with other such activities, but if the Cardinal was so much a man of flesh & blood, he had great virtues & perfections over-shadowing this little fault, if fault it can be called to be free in love.

As to his respect for ladies, I have heard a story of him that bears on this. Ordinarily he had great respect for them, but he forgot it, and not without reason, in connexion with the Duchess of Savoy, Donna Beatrice of Portugal. The Cardinal was on his way to *Rome* in the service of the King his master, and when he was passing through Piedmont he visited the Duke and Duchess. Having conversed awhile with the Duke, he went to pay his respects to the Duchess in her room; and as he approached her, the lady, who was arrogance itself, held out her hand for him to kiss. The Cardinal, resenting this affront, made as if to kiss her on the mouth, from which she at the same time drew back; whereat he lost all patience, and going still nearer grasped her by the head, and in spite of all, kissed

her two or three times. She uttered cries & exclamations, both in Spanish and Portuguese, but had to endure it none the less. 'What!' said he, 'is it for me to put up with such airs & graces? I kiss the Queen my mistress, who is the greatest Queen in the world, & am I not to kiss you, who are only a dirty little Duchess? I would have you to know that I have slept with ladies, not only as beautiful, but of as good or better lineage than yours.' And it is possible that he was telling the truth. This Princess was wrong to behave so haughtily to so high-born a Prince, & him a Cardinal moreover; for there is no Cardinal, seeing the high rank they hold in the Church, but counts himself the equal of the greatest Prince in Christendom. But the Cardinal also was wrong to take so cruel a revenge, however vexatious it may be to a noble & proud spirit, no matter of what profession, to endure an affront. The Cardinal of Granvelle knew how to bring home to the Count of Egmont what is due to a Prince of the Church; and many other examples come to the point of my pen, but I must refrain, for they would clog my discourse.

¶ Returning to my proper subject, I take it up at the late late King Henry II;" who was very respectful to ladies, and their devoted servant, hating all who slandered their honour. When ladies are thus served by a King of such dignity & character, the throng of courtiers will not readily dare to open mouth against them. In addition, the Queen-mother was very firm in upholding the honour of her ladies and maids, and made it hot for the tribe of tatlers & lampooners whenever they were discovered; notwithstanding that she brought their spite on herself as well as on her ladies. The fact is, she cared less for herself than for the others, for the reason, as she said, that she felt her conscience clear, and believed that her purity would speak for her sufficiently; thus she laughed & mocked, more often than not, at lampooners & all malicious scribblers. 'Let them do their worst,' she said, 'let them waste their labour if they like!' All the same, when she caught them, she made them suffer.

It was a freak of the elder Mademoiselle de Limeuil," when first she came to Court, to make a lampoon of all the Court; for she could both

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speak and write well. There was nothing scandalous in it, but only fun; believe me though, the Queen-mother made her smart for it, together with two of her companions who had collaborated. But for her having the honour to be connected with Her Majesty, through the house of Turenne⁴ which was allied to that of Boulogne, she would have been chastised ignominiously; and that by the express command of the King, who had a particular hatred of such writings.

¶ I am reminded now of the Lord of Matha,⁵ a brave & valiant gentleman who was loved by the King, and was a relation of Madame de Valentinois; he was such a joker, that he generally had some humorous quarrel with the ladies and maids of the Court. One day when he had attacked one of the Queen's ladies, there was another called the great Meray⁶ who took the part of her companion, and to her he answered shortly: 'I am not attacking you, Meray, you great barded war-horse!' True enough she was the biggest I ever saw, maid or woman; but she complained to the Queen that he had called her a mare, yes, a great barded war-horse! The Queen was so furious, that Mathas had to leave the Court for some days, favoured though he was by Madame de Valentinois as her kinsman; nor could he enter the chamber of the Queen and her maids for a month after his return.

¶ The Lord of Gersay⁷ behaved much worse to one of the Queen's maids, against whom he had a grudge; for she had got the better of him once, though he was a man that was never at a loss for a word; indeed he was one of the best of talkers & story-tellers, especially when he wished to be malicious. But unfortunately malice, of which he was such a master, was forbidden in those days. What I am about to tell happened once in the Queen's room in the after-dinner hour, where the said maid was present with her companions and certain gentlemen; all sitting on the floor, as was then the custom while the Queen was in the room. Among them was Gersay, who had taken that day from some pages & lackeys a curious plaything, namely a ram's cod, with which they were making sport in the palace-yard, having blown it up to a beautiful size; and with this

concealed about him he reclined beside the girl, till he got a chance to slip it between her dress & her petticoat, which he did so neatly that she was never aware of it, at least not till the Queen rose from her chair to retire. The girl (I must not give her name) of course rose at the same time, and directly in front of the Queen there shot out from her dress this ram's thing, big and hairy, which bounced joyously on the floor six or seven times, as if it wished of its own goodness to give a free entertainment to the company. Was the poor girl astonished? You may say she was, & the Queen too, for it happened in a clear space where all could see. 'Mother of God!' cried the Queen, 'what is that, my dear, and what are you doing with it?' Blushing and nearly in tears, the poor girl said she did not know what it was, and that someone who wished her ill had played this wicked trick on her, she believed it was no other than Gersay. As for him, having seen the beginning of the fun when the ram's cod bounced on the floor, he had slipped out of the room; nor would he return when sent for, such was his fear of the Queen's anger, though he stoutly denied being responsible. For several days he hid from the anger of both Their Majesties; & but for his being, together with Fontaine-Guérin,¹⁸ a prime favourite of the Dauphin, he would have suffered punishment, even though nothing could be brought against him but on conjecture. Secretly the King and his courtiers, as well as plenty of ladies, could not help laughing at the affair, only the sight of the Queen's anger warned them not to be caught at it; for of all ladies in the world she knew best how to crush a person with a rebuke.

¶ There was an honourable gentleman once and a lady of the Court, who from being great friends fell to hatred and quarrelling; till the lady said aloud to him in the Queen's chamber, once when they were having it out together: 'Leave me, or I shall tell what you said to me.' The gentleman, who had related to her in confidence something concerning a great lady, was afraid now that he would suffer for it, expecting to be banished from the Court at least; yet he managed to answer calmly, 'If you tell what I said to you, I shall tell what I did to you.' Who was taken aback? It was

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the girl! All the same she answered, 'what did you do to me?' And the other countered, 'What did I say to you?' To which the girl, 'I know very well what you told me;' & he, 'I know very well what I did to you.' Then she tries, 'I shall give good proof of what you said;' and he retorts, 'I shall give even better proof of what I did to you.' At last, having kept it up some time with thrust & parry, like phrase being met by like, they separately joined the gentlemen and the ladies who happened to be there, though it would still have been a pleasure to them to continue. But the nature of the debate came to the ears of the Queen, who was very angry, and wished immediately to know what it was the gentleman had said and also what the lady had been up to with him. But the two of them, seeing it would lead to serious consequences, judged it best to come to an agreement at once, and to say at their appearance before the Queen, that their contest of words was only a game & that the gentleman in fact had neither said nor done anything to the lady. Thus they met the Queen's demand, who nevertheless held the gentleman to blame and gave him a sharp rebuke, because his words were such as to give rise to scandal.

To me this gentleman has sworn twenty times, that if they had not come to terms and agreed on a story, that is to say, if the girl had made known what he had said to her, thus bringing him into serious trouble, he would surely have carried out his threat and told what he had done to her; challenging them to examine her, & they would find her no virgin, and it was he who had taken her virginity. 'Well,' I said to him, 'suppose she had been examined and found a virgin, for she was unmarried, you would have been lost, it would have cost you your life.'—'Ha, God's Death!' he answered, 'I wanted nothing better than that she should be examined; there was no fear of my life that way, I was very sure of my perch. I had not deflowered her myself, worse luck, but I knew well that another had been there, and who that other was; they would have found her garden broken into and trampled, to her disgrace, so it is she who would have been lost, while I should have had my revenge. I should only have had to marry her and then get rid of her the best way I could.' See

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what risks poor women have to run, whether they are in the right or in the wrong!

¶ I knew a lady of great wealth, who became pregnant by the act of a brave and gallant Prince; there being intention of marriage, at least so it was said, though later the contrary appeared ¹⁹ King Henry was the first to hear of it; and he was extremely vexed, for the lady was somehow related to him. However he made no public scandal of it, but in the evening at the ball led her out to a reel called the Torch;²⁰ then he got another gallant to lead her out for the other reels, which she danced with more spirit & skill than ever before, managing to show off her beautiful figure in such a way that she had no look of pregnancy. Meanwhile the King, who had all through kept a sharp eye on her, saw that she gave no more sign of it than if she had been a virgin; and he actually said to one of his intimates: 'They are wretches and villains who invented the story about this poor girl being pregnant, I have never seen her more graceful; the villains who spoke against her lied, I say, and did great wrong.' In this way the good Prince shielded this young and honourable lady, and he said the same again to the Queen when he was in bed with her that night. But the Queen, not trusting to his proofs, had the girl examined the next morning in her presence, and she was found to be six months gone with child: which she admitted then, & confessed how all was done under pledge of marriage. Still the King, in the goodness of his heart, had the secret kept as close as possible; not wishing to bring scandal on the girl, however angry the Queen might be. They sent her quietly to her nearest relations, where she gave birth to a beautiful son; who was so unfortunate however, as never to be acknowledged by the supposed father. The case dragged on a long time, but the mother could never gain her point.

¶ King Henry was as fond of good stories as the Kings his predecessors, but he never would have scandal brought on ladies or their secrets betrayed; so much so, that whenever he himself went to see a lady (and he was by nature fairly amorous) he was careful to go as secretly as possible,

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lest he should bring her into disrepute or even suspicion. If ever a mistress of his was discovered, it was not by the King's fault or intention, but rather by the lady's own. Such was certainly the case with one I have heard of, a lady of good family called Madame Flamin," from Scotland; who being pregnant by the King's act, far from pouting about it, boldly declared in her Frenchified Scotch: 'I have done the best for myself, thank God; for I am with child by the King, and feel very honoured and very happy. I can tell you the blood royal has in it a liquor more sweet and tasty than any other; I feel all the better for it, without reckoning the wee bit presents that are to come.' The son" that she bore grew up to be the Grand Prior of France, the same who was killed recently at *Marseilles*; and his death was much to be regretted, for he was a brave and honourable Lord, as was shewn in the way he met his end. And whereas in life he was a man of wealth, he was the least tyrannical governor ever known, as the people of *Provence* would testify; splendid as was his style and expenditure, he robbed none, for he was a rich man who was content to keep within bounds.

His mother, like other ladies I have heard of, was of opinion that going to bed with her King was no loss of virtue; only those being whores who give themselves to men of low estate, instead of great Kings and gallant gentlemen. Thus she would count honourable that Amazon Queen I have told you of, who came three hundred leagues to be got with child by Alexander, that she might have a successor of his race. Yet it is said that one man is as good as another for this work.

¶ After King Henry came King Francis II, whose reign was so short that slanderers had no time to take up positions for their attacks on ladies; but however long he had reigned it is not to be believed that he would have allowed them in his Court. For he was a King of frank and kindly disposition, who took no pleasure in scandal, but on the contrary was very respectful to ladies and honoured them greatly; "also there were the two Queens, his wife and mother, as well as his uncles, all of whom were very severe on these tatlers and sharp-tongues. Which reminds me that once,

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when he was at *Saint-Germain en Laye* about the month of August or September, the fancy took him to go in the evening to see his stags at their rutting in this beautiful forest; and he took with him some Princes of his intimate circle, as well as some great ladies both married and unmarried, whom I could name if I would. There was a gentleman then who began to talk of it, saying that this did not suggest much virtue or chastity in the women, their going to see the loves and rutting of beasts; inasmuch as the appetite of Venus would be heated in them the more at sight of this representation. So much would they desire (he said) to taste, that their mouths would water, that is to say their lower mouths; and for that spittle there would be no cure but some other, meaning the male seed. The King got to hear of this, and the Princes and ladies who had accompanied him. Believe me, if the gentleman had not escaped so soon, it would have gone hardly with him; nor did he appear at Court till the King's reign was ended by his death.

At that time there were many defamatory libels against governors of provinces; but there was none which stung and gave such offence as one entitled *The Tiger*;⁴⁴ in imitation of Cicero's first invective against Catiline; for it spoke of the loves of a great and beautiful lady and of a great kinsman of hers. If the daring author had been apprehended, though he had had a thousand lives, he would have lost them all; for both the nobleman and the lady were so hurt in their dignity as to be almost in despair.

This King Francis was not subject to love as were his predecessors; and truly he would have been to blame otherwise, for he had the most beautiful wife in the world & the most amiable. Whoever has such a wife goes not a-roving as other men, for it would be only misery to him; and who meddles not with ladies has little to say against them, or in their favour either for the matter of that, unless it be to praise his own. That is a maxim I heard from an honourable person; but it is one that I have seen not always to hold good.

¶ King Charles came next, & he on account of his tender age cared little at first about ladies, caring rather to pass his time in the amusements of

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youth. But he was well trained by his tutor, the late M. de Sipièrre, who in my opinion & in that of every other was at once the most honourable and the most charming cavalier of his day, being especially courteous and reverential to ladies; with result that the King, his master & disciple, was as good as any of the Kings his predecessors in his attitude to ladies; for never as boy or man did he see a lady but he would salute her; no matter how difficult it might be for him, whether running or resting, on horse or on foot, he would doff his bonnet most reverentially. When he came to the age of love, he was the cavalier of several honourable maids and dames, as I happen to know; and the least gentleman of his Court could not have been more respectful toward them than this honourable King.

For all that it was in his reign that the great lampooners began their reign of terror, among them being some gallant gentlemen of the Court, whom I could name but will not. These were outrageous in their sneers at ladies, both in general & in particular, even naming the greatest; over which some of the writers were involved in serious quarrels in which they cut a very poor figure. Not that they ever confessed their authorship, for they denied everything; knowing that confession would not get them off, as the King would make them pay for their attacks on great ladies. Most of them, putting the best face on it they could, when their authorship was insisted on, meekly accepted the lie a hundred times thrown in their teeth, preferring this airy chastisement to other; thus they would drink up a thousand insults as milk, not venturing any retort for fear of their lives. I often used to wonder that these men should think it worth while to malign others when they made nothing of so many insults hurled in their own faces. Some even had the reputation of being courageous; but in this matter their gallantry consisted in accepting common insults without so much as uttering a word.

I remember a lampoon that was made against a great lady, a widow of great beauty and honour, who wished to marry secondly a young and handsome Prince. There were several persons, to my knowledge, who did not wish this marriage; & to put off the Prince they made a lampoon

on the lady, the most scandalous I have seen, in which she was grouped with five or six famous harlots of antiquity, and said to surpass even these in lubricity. The authors of the lampoon presented it to the Prince, saying however that it was the work of otheis, and had merely been handed to them. Having read it he promptly gave the lie to its authors, & lashed them at least in the air; all which they endured in silence, and these were men of courage, as I know. Yet the affair for a time gave the Prince to pause, for the lampoon hit off neatly certain peculiarities of the lady, however, the marriage took place at the end of two years.

This King Charles was too generous and kindly ever to favour such men; to have a joke with them apart he liked well enough, but would not have the vulgar drink their fill; saying that his Court was the most illustrious in the world for noble and beautiful ladies, who had made it famous everywhere, and he would not have it cheapened and brought into disesteem by such tatling gallants. It was well enough, he said, to talk thus of the courtesans of *Rome* and *Venice* and other places, but not of the Court of France; such things might happen there, but they were not to be spoken of. Yes, this King had great respect for ladies; so much so that in his latter days, as I know, when it was wished to give him a bad impression of certain great ladies, as being involved in some matters touching him personally, he would believe nothing against them, seeing them fair and of honourable rank. He made them as good cheer as ever, and carried their gratitude to his grave, whereon they shed great abundance of tears.

¶ And thereafter they had cause to regret him, when King Henry III came to the throne; who having received in Poland some bad accounts of them, was much colder to them on his return than he had been formerly. Of these and of some other ladies I could mention he became a rigorous censor, so that they had little love for him thenceforth; I believe that they did him no little harm,⁴⁵ and were partly the cause of his misfortunes and ultimate ruin. I could give particulars of what I say, but prefer to pass them over; only let it be remembered that woman is much

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inclined to vengeance, which she will execute in the end, however long the delay. Of an opposite nature is the vengeance of some men, which is hot and burning enough at the beginning to convince all, but cools off and vanishes with long passage of time. That is why with them one need only guard against the first attempt, and be alert to parry that blow; but with women the first fury survives all waiting, and the attack may come after years; at least it is so in the case of some, and I do not even say that they are many.

Some have excused the war of denunciation made by this King on ladies on the ground that it was for the bridling and correction of vice; as if correction would serve in this matter, when it is the nature of woman to burn most for what she is forbidden, so that it is vain to set a watch on her. I can say from my own experience that there was no turning from the broad path on his account.

Some ladies he loved with great respect, as I know well, and served very honourably; especially a beautiful Princess,²⁶ whom he fell so much in love with before going to Poland, that after he became King he resolved to marry her. She was already married to a great Prince, but one that was in rebellion against him & had fled into a foreign country to raise men for a war; however the lady died in childbed soon after our King's return to France. Death alone prevented this marriage, for he was set on it; by favour and dispensation of the Pope he would have married her, for she would not have refused so great a King, and there were other reasons as we may suppose.

But to some others he made love only to denounce them. Among them I know of a great lady²⁷ on whom he took vengeance for some displeasures caused him by her husband; not being able to catch him he published to several persons the lady's frailty with himself; but it was a soft vengeance, for instead of being the death of the lady it was her very life. I know of another whom he thought to be indulging overmuch in gallantry, and was displeased particularly by something she did to him; to her he made love with an express purpose. The lady was easily persuaded to give him

an appointment in a garden, which she did not fail to keep; but he would not touch her, only had witnesses to see how she brought her body to market, and then banished her from Court with ignominy. At least the story goes that he did not touch her, but of course he did!

This King Henry III was very curious about ladies, & desired to know the lives of this one and that, and to sound their inmost wishes; it is said that he sometimes gave a share of his great fortunes to one or other of his gentlemen for private confidences. Happy indeed were they, for the leavings of such great Kings must be good to have! Ladies feared him greatly, as I have observed; for he reprimanded them often himself, beside asking the Queen his mother to do so. The Queen on her own account was prompt enough with reprimands, though she never encouraged tale-bearers, as I have shewn by the instances quoted earlier; you can imagine then, if she was so active in her displeasure with those, what she would do to others who touched her ladies in the very quick of their honour.

This King had been accustomed from his youth to hear tales of ladies, as I can bear witness: indeed I have told him one or two myself; likewise he used to tell them, but very secretly for fear of the Queen his mother; who wished him only to tell them to her, that she might administer correction. The result was that when he came of age and had his liberty he did not lose the habit of exchanging tales; thus he came to know how the ladies lived in his Court and Kingdom as well as if he had been the lover of them all; or at least he knew as much of some and especially of the greatest ladies. If there were any who had come recently to Court, he would accost them very courteously and then relate to them such facts in their lives that they were astonished in their minds, while denying everything to him of course. But if he amused himself in this way he did not neglect in greater matters to apply his wits seriously; so that he has been held as the greatest King France has had for a hundred years, as I wrote elsewhere in a chapter devoted solely to him.²⁸ I will say no more here of King Henry III, though I may be told that I should have drawn greater abundance of examples from his reign, not keeping back any that

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I know. Well, I certainly know plenty, and some of rare quality; but it is not my purpose to give at one sweep all the life of the Court any more than of the rest of the world; besides I should not be able to veil my stories sufficiently to avoid giving glimpses of scandal.

¶ Let us consider more particularly the detractors of ladies, who are of various kinds. There are those for example who are made malicious by something the ladies have done to displease them; in which case the ladies may be the most chaste in the world, but they will be represented as devils steeped in every wickedness instead of the angels pure and beautiful they are. Thus I knew an honourable gentleman who for some slight displeasure done to him by a very respectable lady libelled her most villainously. It led to a sharp quarrel, when the gentleman said to her champion: 'I know well that I am wrong, and that this lady is as chaste and virtuous as can be; but whoever she may be that has given me the least offence, let her be as sober and modest as the Virgin Mary herself, I will make her out too bad for hanging, since I can have no other satisfaction of her, not being a man.' Such reasoning may be good; but there is God, who may lose patience with it.

Then there is a class of detractors, who having made love to ladies and won nothing from their chastity, out of spite speak of them as wantons; or they do worse, declaring that they have had their will of them, but finding them altogether too lascivious have left them. I have known many gentlemen of this disposition in the Courts of our Kings.

Then there is the case of women, who having tired of their pretty bed-companions, have jilted them & taken others in their place, according to the drift of their fickle fancies; whereupon their former pets, made spiteful by despair, will draw you an unspeakable picture of the poor women; even going so far as to recount in detail the amorous sport they have had with them, and supporting the story by mention of any marks they may happen to bear on their naked bodies. Again there are men, who in vexation at favours given to men other than themselves, malign ladies out of measure; and have them watched and spied on, that they may give to the

would closer conjectures of the truth. And there are others who under the sting of jealousy, without any further reason, slander the men most favoured by the ladies of their desire; aye, and slander the ladies themselves too, whom they love so blindly that they see only that half of them turned towards others. That is one of the worst effects of jealousy; detractors indeed of this sort are not so much to blame as one might think, for their conduct must be imputed as much to love as to jealousy, the two being brother & sister of one birth. But there is another sort of detractors who seem to be born to it, having the habit so ingrained that rather than not malign anyone they will malign themselves. Reader, is the honour of ladies likely to be spared in the mouths of such? I have seen many of them in our Court, who not daring to speak of men for fear of their steel, lifted the petticoats of the poor ladies, whose only revenge must ever be tears and penitent words. All the same I have known men to get into trouble over it, for there were brothers and kinsmen, lovers and perhaps husbands, who made the wretch eat his words and wish he had never spoken. But if I were to describe every sort of detractor that ladies have to fear I should never be done.

¶ There is an opinion on love which I have known many to hold, namely that a secret love has no value, one needs to make it manifest in some way, if not to all the world at least to some intimate circle. Or if it cannot be told, it may be made manifest by display of favours, such as liveries or colours, worn in the performances of chivalry; for example in tournaments or masquerades, tilting at the ring or combats over the barrier; or better still in the real combats of war. It is a fact that in thus manifesting love there is great satisfaction. For as the performance of some splendid feat of war would advantage a captain nothing did it pass in silence and none know of it, but would rather be to him a mortal vexation, so it is with a lover who has generously given his heart; this at least is what they say who hold this opinion on love. And by none is it held more strongly than by M. de Nemours, the paragon of all chivalry; for if ever Prince or gentleman was happy in his loves, he was that one. And he took no

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pleasure in hiding them from his friends; though it is true that from the most of men he kept them so secret that it was only with difficulty one could conjecture whom he loved.

Of course in the case of married ladies one endangers them by publishing one's love, but in the case of maids and widows it does not matter; for all is covered by the pretext of a future marriage. I knew an honourable gentleman of the Court, cavalier of a great lady, who was one day with his friends when the talk turned on their mistresses; they all swore to reveal their names and the favours they had received, but this gentleman would not let it be known who was his. He invented another somewhere else, and thus threw dust in the eyes of the company; though there was a great Prince who had sworn with the rest, and had strong suspicions of the love he concealed; still they could get no more out of him. But in his own mind he cursed a hundred times the fate which forbade him to relate like the others his good fortune; for the good is ever pleasanter to tell than the bad. I knew another,¹⁹ a very gallant cavalier, who presumed too freely to declare his mistress, whose name he should have concealed by acts as well as words; & as a result he came near being killed by an assassin; but if he escaped that time he did not over another affair, which resulted in his death.

¶ I was at Court in the time of King Francis II, when the Count of Saint-Aignan married the young Bourdézière.²⁰ The next day, when the bridegroom came into the King's chamber, everyone began to banter him in the usual way; and among others there was a great lord distinguished for his courage, who asked him how many stages he had ridden. The bridegroom answered five. Now there happened to be present an honourable gentleman, a secretary, who was a special favourite of a great Princess, not to be named; and he said that this was not much, considering the good road he had travelled & the fine weather they were having, for it was summer at the time. At this the great lord, who had asked the question, cried: 'God's Death! you want partridges enough to your bag, you do!'—'And why not?' replied the secretary, 'By God! I have bagged

a dozen in twenty-four hours, & that in the fairest meadow that is around here, or could be anywhere in France.' Who was dumbfounded but the lord? for he learned thereby what he had long suspected; & being himself very much in love with the same Princess, he was mortified at having hunted so long in the same country without ever a kill, while the other had had such happy success. But he concealed his feelings at the time, awaiting a chance to strike; and afterwards would have taken it out of the secretary but for a certain consideration not to be mentioned. Being foiled, he nursed the grudge always. The secretary would have been well advised not to have boasted so of his sport, even though it was such a lucky adventure for him; for it was likely to lead to scandal and broils.

¶ But what should one say of a gentleman of fashion who for some displeasure done him by his mistress had the impudenceⁿ to shew her husband a portrait of her, which she had given him and he wore round his neck? The husband was astonished, and he shewed thereafter less love to his wife, though she put the best colour on the matter she could.

¶ A worse case was that of a great lord I know of, who being vexed at some trick played him by his mistress, staked her portrait at dice & lost it to one of his soldiers, for he had a high command in the infantry; at which she was so angry when she heard of it that she nearly died of vexation. The Queen-mother heard of it too, & gave him a sharp reprimand, saying it was too insolent of him to go and chance the portrait of a fair and honest lady on the throw of the dice. But the lord made all right again when he explained that before the throw he had taken out & kept the parchment, only staking the frame it was set in, which was of gold enriched with gems. I have often heard the story gone over between the lord and the same lady, who came to treat it as a good joke, so that I have had many a good laugh over it.

¶ Here I would mention that there are some ladies who in their love-affairs like to be bullied and threatened, one might almost say gobbled up; and they are won by such methods rather than by tender ones. It is just the same with fortresses, some of which are to be taken by force and

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others by more patient ways. But ladies of this sort do not like to be ill spoken of, least of all to be denounced as harlots; for often words hurt more than deeds. Sulla would never pardon the city of *Athens*, nor be content till he brought it to utter ruin; not indeed for its obstinacy in resisting him, but because the defenders maligned him from the walls, and touched at the quick the honour of *Metella* his wife.

¶ In a certain quarter of the world, that I will not name, the soldiers on each side in sieges and skirmishes used to shout at one another what were reproaches to the honour of their sovereign Princesses, going so far in their banter as to say, 'Yours is a good hand at skittles!'—'Yours can knock them down as well!' By means of these gibes and nicknames the Princesses, more than if they had exhorted their soldiers, were the cause of their doing much mischief and cruelty, as I myself can bear witness.

¶ I have heard tell that the main reason why the Queen of Hungary was roused to light those fine fires in *Picardy* and other parts of France, was the unbridled insolence of some tatlers & tale-bearers, who talked openly of her loves, and sang aloud in all places:

*Hey, hey for Barbanson
And the Queen of Hungary.*

A coarse song certainly, in which one smells the breath of the bawling villager and vagabond.

¶ Cato³³ could never love Cæsar from the day of the debate in the Senate on Catiline's conspiracy (to which Cæsar was suspected of being a party) when there was brought into the latter secretly a note, or to be precise a love-letter which was sent by Servilla, a sister of Cato, making an assignation for a night together. Cato never doubting but this would furnish proof of Cæsar's complicity with Catiline, cried that the Senate should order him to lay the note on the table. Cæsar shewed it, being thus constrained, and so the frailty of Cato's sister was made public, to her great dishonour. I leave you to imagine whether Cato, whatever pretence he might make of hating Cæsar for the Republic's sake, could ever have

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loved him after this scandalous affair. Yet Cæsar was not to blame, it was a simple necessity for him to shew the note; other wise he would have lost his life. I believe Servilla thought no worse of him for it, as their loves continued just the same; whence came Brutus, who was said to be a son of Cæsar; but if so, Brutus rewarded him ill for having brought him into the world.

¶ Well, ladies who give themselves to great men run many risks; and if they get favours out of them, as wealth & promotion, they pay for them dearly. I heard tell of a fair and honest lady who was of good family indeed but not of so good as a great lord that was in love with her. He found her one day alone in her room with her women, sitting on the bed; and after some conversation and some proposals of love he embraced her, and with gentle force made her lie on the bed. Then he came to the great assault, which enduring with a little decent resistance, she said to him: 'It is a wonder that you great lords cannot refrain from using your authority and privileges over us your inferiors. If only silence were as common with you as free-speaking, we could forgive you and find you only too desirable; therefore I beg you, Sir, to keep secret what you are doing, and to guard my honour.' Such are the usual appeals made by ladies to their superiors; 'Ah, Sir!' they cry, 'do but think of my honour!' Or it may be, 'Ah, Sir! if you speak of this I am lost; for God's sake guard my honour.' Others again will say, 'Sir, if only you do not breathe a word of this and my honour be safe, I care for nothing else' As if to argue that one can do what one likes in secret! Yes, provided the world know nothing of it they think it is no dishonour to them.

¶ Ladies great and proud say to gallants their inferiors, 'Take care not to say a word of this, not a single word, or it will cost you your life; I will have you thrown into the water in a sack, or assassinated or ham-strung!' these are the sort of appeals they make! In fact there is not a lady, no matter of what rank, but dreads to be a subject of scandal, a name to be paraded through the streets or even mentioned in the mouths of men. Yet there are some so ill advised, so infatuated or carried away by love,

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that without men accusing them they denounce themselves. Not long since there was such a one, a fair and honest lady of good means, with whom a great lord fell in love, and presently enjoyed her embraces. He gave her a costly & beautiful bracelet, on which were very good portraits of them both; & this she was rash enough to wear on her naked arm above the elbow. Till one day her husband, being in bed with her, caught sight of it and examined it; the end of it being that he got rid of her by a violent death. There was an ill advised woman!

¶ I knew in former times a sovereign Prince³⁵ who kept as mistress for the space of three years one of the most beautiful ladies³⁴ of his Court; at the end of which time he had to make a journey for the conquest of some country. But before going he fell very much in love with another lady,³⁵ a Princess, who was fair & honest if ever one was. To prove to her that he had given up his one-time mistress for her, & that he wished to honour & serve her in everything, he gave her before his departure all the presents that the other had given him, as jewels and rings and bracelets, portraits and every other token of love, without a care for the memories attached to them; some of which were seen & taken notice of by the rejected one, who nearly died of vexation. At the same time she was not ashamed to let the matter become known, for she was content to bring scandal on herself when it included the other. I believe³⁶ that if the Princess had not died soon after the Prince would have married her on his return.

¶ I knew another Prince,³⁷ though not so great, who during his first marriage & widowerhood was in love with a fair & honest lady of fashion; and he gave her during their loves and happy association very beautiful presents, as necklaces and rings, in fact all sorts of jewellery and fine ornaments. Among other things there was a costly and beautiful mirror, on which his portrait was painted. Now in course of time the Prince married a great Princess, who had spoilt his taste for the mistress he had, though neither could give the other anything in a contest of beauty. And the Princess by much importuning persuaded her husband to send and ask back from his former mistress all the beautiful exquisite things he

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had given her. It nearly broke the lady's heart; yet she shewed herself of so high a heart (for although no Princess she came of one of the best families of France) that she sent back all the beautiful & exquisite things, including the mirror with the portrait of the Prince; only first, to improve it a little, she took pen and ink and sketched in a great pair of horns in the middle of the forehead. Then delivering all to the messenger, she said: 'Here, my friend, take this to your master, and tell him that I send it just as he gave it to me, with nothing added or taken away, unless it be that he himself has added something since. And tell that beautiful Princess his wife, who has so importuned him to ask back what he gave me, that if such-and-such a lord—mentioning his name as I happen to know—had done the same to her mother, if he had sought again and taken away what he had given her for often sleeping with her, ay, all his tokens of love and joy, she herself would be as poor in ornaments and jewellery as any maid of her Court; tell her also that for the adornment of her head, which is so loaded at the expense of that lord and of her mother's front, she would have to go every morning to the gardens to gather flowers, instead of the jewels she now has. Well! let her take both buckle and pin, & make the best show she can; I leave it all to her.' Whoever knew this girl would believe her capable of such a stroke; indeed she has told me of it herself, and how free she was with her words. She nearly got into trouble over it, both with the husband & with the wife, to whom it was a bitter exposure; but the general feeling was against the Prince, as being himself to blame for driving the poor lady to madness, when she had fairly earned his presents by the sweat of her body.

This girl, being one of the most beautiful and charming of her time, succeeded in marrying a very rich man, notwithstanding that she had made the Prince so free of her body. Only her husband was not of as good family as she; so that when they fell out one day over the honour each had done the other in marrying, he was reduced to make this answer to her boast of high lineage: 'And I, surely I have done more for you than you for me; for I have dishonoured myself to restore to you your honour.'

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By which he implied that whereas she had lost her honour with the Prince, he had restored it to her in taking her for wife.

¶ When King Francis I left Madame de Chateaubriand, his favourite mistress, to take in her place Madame d'Estampes, the latter was a girl known as Helly, whom the Queen-regent had appointed one of her maids of honour. She was introduced to King Francis at *Bordeaux*, as he was returning from Spain, & he made her his mistress forthwith, Madame de Chateaubriand being driven out as one nail by another. And I have heard tell, on good authority as I believe, that Madame d'Estampes begged the King to recover from Madame de Chateaubriand all the most beautiful jewels he had given her; not for their market value indeed, as at that time pearls and precious stones were not so fashionable as they have become since, but for love of the pretty mottoes^s that were engraved & inscribed on them; which had been composed by his sister the Queen of Navarre, a great master of this art. King Francis was persuaded, & promised to do what she asked. As good as his word, he sent a gentleman to ask for the things; to whom Madame de Chateaubriand pretended illness promptly, sending word to him to come again in three days, and he should have what he asked for. In the mean time she sent for a goldsmith, such was her vexation, and ordered him to melt down all the jewels, without regard to the pretty mottoes engraved on them; and when the gentleman returned in due course she gave him all the jewels converted into gold ingots. 'Go now,' said she, 'and deliver these to the King; and tell him that since it has pleased him to revoke what he gave me so liberally, I return all to him in these ingots. As to the mottoes, I have them so well imprinted on my mind, & hold them so dear, that I could not let any other possess them for her joy and pleasure.' When the King had received all, both the ingots and the lady's message, all he said was this: 'Take it all back to her! what I did was not for the value of the things, which I would give back to her were it double, but for my pleasure in the mottoes. Since these are lost by her act I return the gold which I want none of. I must say she has shewn a more noble courage in this than I thought could be

in a woman.' Ah! a woman of great heart thus smarting under injury and disdain may indeed do great things.

¶ Princes who make such revocations of presents remind one of a very different act of Madame de Nevers,⁹ of the house of Bourbon, daughter of M. de Montpensier; who was a beautiful Princess known for virtue and modesty both in France and in Spain, in which latter country she spent a part of her youth with Queen Elizabeth of France, as her cup-bearer at table; for the custom there is for the Queen to be served by her ladies and maids, each of them having her proper rank, as with us the gentlemen about our Kings. This Princess was married to the Count of Eu, eldest son of M. de Nevers; and if she was worthy of him so was he of her, for he was one of the most handsome & charming Princes of his day. Consequently he was loved and sought after by the fair and honest ladies of the Court, and among others by one who was more than this, being adroit and clever as well. This lady became his mistress, and it happened one day that she saw on his finger a very beautiful ring, set with a diamond worth from fifteen hundred to two thousand crowns, which the Queen of Spain had given him at parting; and this ring she praised greatly, shewing plainly her desire to possess it. The Prince, who was always very generous, gave it to her freely, leading her to believe that he had won it at tennis; nor did the lady make any difficulty of accepting it, but taking it as a proof of his devotion, she always wore it on her finger for love of him. Now M. de Nevers had previously worn the ring in the presence of his wife, and to her he now explained that he had lost it at tennis; or maybe he said that it was lying in pawn, it matters not which. But when his wife saw the ring on the finger of this lady, whom she had guessed to be his mistress, what did she say or do? Madame de Nevers was so prudent & had such command of herself, that though she changed colour at the moment, it was the only sign she gave of her vexation; which quietly dissembling, she turned her head in the other direction and never murmured a word of it either to her husband or to his mistress. In which she was greatly to be praised for not turning cross and raging, especially

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for not exposing the lady to scandal, as many others I know would have done; who thus would only have provided an entertainment for the company and have started much malicious gossip.

Which shews that reserve in such affairs is good & necessary; also that the erring lady may be lucky or unlucky in whom she has to deal with, just as it is in every sort of adventure. There are ladies so fated that they cannot take a step aside or make the least stumble in the path of virtue, cannot even dip a finger in the lake of pleasure, without being instantly denounced and lampooned. While there are others who with whole sail can scud over that lake, who can even bathe with naked bodies in the sweet waters of Venus, swimming with wide-spread limbs and joyously diving; or they can sail to Cyprus and the temple-gardens of Venus, and there enjoy themselves according to their fancy; for they are exempt from criticism as the babe unborn, and to the Devil with anyone who speaks of their doings! Thus in the matter of scandal fortune favours some and has a down on others; I have often seen it in my life, and am sure others could give instances too.

¶ In the time of King Charles there was published at *Fontainebleau* a wicked and scandalous lampoon, which was as little sparing of Princesses and great ladies as of others; ha! it would have been bad for the author, if his name had ever been known for certain. Again at *Blois*, when the marriage of the Queen of Navarre was arranged with her King, there was another such scandalous publication directed against a great lady, the author of which could never be discovered; though several gentlemen were implicated, who filled the air with brazen denials. And so many others have been published, that one has hardly known peace from them in this reign; and it was the same in the reign of King Henry III. Especially there was a very scandalous one in the form of a song, which went to the tune of a coranto then being danced at Court; with the result that it was sung by pages and lackeys, in high keys and low.

¶ In the time of King Henry even worse happened; a gentleman of my acquaintance, whom I have heard named at least as responsible, presented

to his mistress one day a book of paintings, in which appeared thirty-two ladies of the Court, some of high and some of middle rank. All were represented very life-like on couches, sporting with their lovers, who were as plainly painted as they. One lady would be shewn with two or three lovers, another with more and another with less; while between them they figured in twenty-seven different postures, corresponding to those in the book of Aretino. All the portraits were so true and life-like that they seemed actually to speak and move; some of the ladies being naked or in disarray, and others dressed in the same gowns & ornaments, with the same style of head-dress, as they might be seen in any day; and the men likewise. In a word, the book was designed and executed with such art as one could not but admire; all the text was illuminated, and the whole cost eight or nine hundred crowns.

The lady to whom it was given once lent it to another, her companion and close friend, who was a favourite and intimately loved by a great lady figuring in the book, being indeed one of the most prominent and striking figures there; so the lady to whom it was lent took a special interest, seeing how nearly it concerned her. Then being curious of every experience, she wished to look through it with another, a great lady her cousin, with whom she was much in love; so she invited this other to the entertainment, in which she would see herself among those portrayed. The scrutiny was made with careful curiosity, leaf by leaf, without any being passed over lightly; so that two good hours were thus passed away after dinner. The cousin instead of being offended or in any way annoyed, found it the best of jokes, admiring and dwelling on the pictures; which so excited their sensual and lascivious natures that the two fell to kissing one another like doves, and from that to embraces ever more amorous, for they had long indulged in this sport together.

These ladies were harder students and more enduring than one I have been told of, who looking into this book one day with two of her companions, was so excited and fell into such an ecstasy of amorous desire at sight of the performances there represented that she saw no further than

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the fourth page, fainting right away at the fifth. There indeed was a strange cause of fainting! very different from Octavia's, I mean the sister of Augustus Cæsar, who fainted on hearing Veigil recite those three lines which he wrote on her dead son Marcellus, three lines for which alone she gave him three thousand crowns. That was love too, but of another sort!

¶ I have heard a story of a great Prince" (and myself was at Court at the time of the happening) who after the loss of his wife, being well advanced in years, lived very continently in widowerhood; & this only bore out the reputation he had for piety. Yet he became desirous to enter into second marriage with a young Princess, at once beautiful and virtuous. It was ten years now since our widower had touched a woman, and fearing that he had forgotten the way of it—as if it were an art that could be forgotten!—& that he would be mocked at on the first night for doing nothing worth while, he wished to make an experiment first; so by means of money he won the consent of a beautiful young woman who was a virgin like the wife he was to take; it is even said that he chose one having some resemblance to his future wife's features. Fortune was so kind to him that he was able to give proof of having forgotten none of his early lessons; and the experiment made him so confident that he went cheerfully to the assault of his wife's fort, where he won victory and reputation.

¶ This experiment is happier than that of a gentleman I have heard named, whom his father wished to marry, though he was still a young simpleton. The boy like the old widower wished first to make an experiment in order to know if he should be good company to his wife in bed; and so a few months before the marriage he discovered a pretty light-o'-love, whom he got to come every evening after dinner to his father's warren, it being then summer-time. And there he tumbled & rummaged the girl, amid the freshness of the green trees and a fountain's spray, till he became a fury at the game; with the result that he feared no man's rivalry when it should come to the quenching of his wife's fires. But alas! when he joined his wife on the night of the wedding, he was unable

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to do anything. He was fairly dumbfounded, and could only curse that treacherous gun of his for missing fire, as if it disliked the place he was in. But thinking of this he plucked up courage, and said to his wife: 'Sweetheart, I don't know what this means, for every evening lately I have been in a fury in my father's warren;' and he gave her an account of his heroic performances. 'Let us go to sleep,' he said at last, 'I have decided what to do; to-morrow after dinner I shall take you there, and you will see what you will see!' All of which he carried out, and his wife had full satisfaction; whence the catch-phrase was started at Court, 'If I had you in my father's warren you'd see what I would do!' It seems that the god of gardens, Master Priapus, with the fauns and lusty satyrs who preside over woods, give their aid to good fellows and prosper their deeds and enterprises.

But all experiments do not end happily like these, for in the matter of love I have known many good champions, and have heard of others, who failed to keep their engagements; forgetting their lessons, as we might say, when they came into class. For men may be either too hot or too cold, accordingly as the fiery or the icy humour suddenly floods their veins. Thus some are lost in ecstasy at finding in their arms so sovereign a good, while others become apprehensive, both alike becoming soft where they should be hard, as if they had the sinew knotted, without their having the least notion of the cause. The truth is there are so many unexpected conditions which may upset our calculations that it would take a life-time to describe them all, I must refer you to the married men and to other adventurers in the field of love, who know a hundred times more about it than I.

¶ Experiments may be good for men, but they are not for women; for example I have heard tell of a mother, a lady of quality, who had promised in marriage an only daughter of hers whom she held very dear. But she feared that her daughter could not endure the first hard entry, for the gentleman she had chosen, though very honourable, was said to be big in that quarter & very rough; so before letting the marriage come

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on she got a well-grown young page of hers to practise on her daughter a dozen times; saying it was only the first penetration that was painful, and if it was done gently and in a small way whatever stretching was to follow could be more easily endured. Which proved to be true, nor was anything alleged against her daughter.

¶ This experiment is much more defensible than one I was told of in Italy, which was made by a father after marrying his son, while still a young fool, to a very beautiful girl; to whom he had been able to do nothing either the first or the second night, such a zany was he. The father had asked both his son and daughter-in-law how they liked marriage, & what success they had had; to which they had answered one after the other, '*Niente*, nothing.' — 'What was the reason?' he asked the son, who answered sheepishly that he did not know how it should be done. Whereupon he took his son by one hand and his daughter-in-law by the other, and having led them into a bed-room said to them, 'Well, I will shew you how it must be done.' He made his daughter-in-law lie down on the bed, and having opened her legs wide, said to his son, 'Now watch what I do;' and to his daughter-in-law, 'Do not stir, you will not be hurt. Then approaching with standard raised, he affected an entrance, saying at the same time, 'Notice what I do and what I say; *dentro, fuero, dentro, fuero*; in, out, in, out.' Often he repeated these words, as he thrust in and again withdrew, only taking care that it should not be *fuero* altogether. Presently, after these frequent movements and repetitions of *Dentro-fuero*, as the crisis approached, he began to say sharp and quick, *Dentro, dentro, dentro, dentro*, with devil a *fuero* until he had finished. So under the pretext of instruction he committed flat adultery with his daughter-in-law; who for her part, whether she was indeed so simple or more truly a knowing one, found the demonstration much to her taste; as well as others that were given both by father and son, for the son needed practise to make him perfect, and the father wished to be thorough in his instruction. No lesson is worth anything otherwise!

¶ I have heard from several happy adventurers in love that they have

of Gallant Ladies

known ladies to pass into a faint on the sweet altar of pleasure, or in their abandonment to cry out, 'Oh! I shall die!' I fancy it is a sweet death they have, & one from which they are restored only too soon. There are others whose eyes roll in their heads for delight, as if they had indeed come to their last hour; and thereafter they lie as senseless and immovable. I have heard of others who straightened their limbs, with muscles so rigidly set that they brought on cramp; one lady I heard of being so subject to it that she could never find a remedy. Others make their bones crack, as when a limb out of joint is put in by the surgeon.

¶ Talking of fainting fits, I heard a story of a lady who was once being enjoyed by her lover on the lid of a chest; and when the delicious moment came, she was so overcome that she fell down behind, with her legs waving in the air; where she became jammed between the chest and the hangings of the wall. While she was struggling with the help of her lover to get free, some company came in and surprised the lady thus acting the forked tree; indeed they had time to see most of what she was wearing, which happily was very nice. The truth of the matter she concealed as well as she could by saying that this man had pushed her over the chest in play; at the same time giving it to be understood that he was the last man in the world she could love.

¶ This lady ran a greater risk than another I have heard tell of, who had a curious experience after being enjoyed by her lover. They coupled happily on the edge of her bed, but it chanced that he had a new pair of pumps with very slippery soles, in which his feet rested on the leaded tiles of the floor, these also being rather slippery; so that when he felt the final rush of pleasure and stretched out his legs, he began to slide back without being able to stop; till the spangles covering his doublet tore the skin of his mistress' belly, of her mount of love and of her thighs, just as if the claws of a cat had passed over them. The sudden smarting of this made the lady give a scream before she could stop herself; but wait, the best was yet to come. It being summer & very hot weather, the lady had dressed rather less modestly than at other times, putting on only a

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white silk mantle over her chemise, and leaving off her drawers; so that as the gentleman finished his slide his chin and his mouth and his nose were in turn softly brushed before coming to a stop between her thighs; the same brush being freshly lathered with his own cream, which twice already he had jetted into her, filling her so full that it came out & covered the parts around. The result was that from nose to chin he was so well lathered you would have thought he had soaped himself for shaving; at sight of which the lady forgot the pain of her scratching, & bursting out laughing said to him, 'You're a dainty fellow, to give your face such a good washing, though it wasn't with *Naples* soap!' Afterwards she told the story to another lady her companion, and he likewise to another gentleman; that is how I am able to give it, for it was quickly passed on, being one that never failed to raise a laugh.

¶ We may be sure that ladies, when they are alone with others their intimate friends, come out with stories as good as ours & exchange secrets of their love-affairs at which they laugh heartily; especially making fun of their gallants when they have failed or done something absurd. Better still, they steal one another's lovers, not only by winning their love but by getting out of them the secret of their curious practices; for a lady will take advantage of this knowledge to fan the flames of desire in a man; or failing that, she may use it to take revenge on him, as well as to score off another lady in their private conversations.

¶ Well, enough has been said on this subject. I only wish that tatlers in our France could be cured of their malice, after the example of Spain, where none dares on his life to touch the honour of great ladies. There such respect is paid to them that if ladies appear in any place whatsoever & the cry is raised of '*Lugar a las damas*, Ladies present!' everyone bows in the most reverential manner; and any sort of insolence in their presence may be punished with death.

When the Empress,⁴² wife of the Emperor Charles, was making her entry into *Toledo*, I have heard that the Marquis of Villana,⁴³ one of the great lords of Spain, uttered a threat against a marshal, who had called to

him to walk faster; and on this account he was in danger of severe penalties because the threat was uttered in the presence of the Empress; it would not have mattered so much if it had only been in the presence of the Emperor.

When the Duke of Feria⁴⁴ was in Flanders at the time the Queens Eleanor⁴⁵ and Mary⁴⁶ were passing through the country, followed by their ladies and maids, he fell to quarrelling with his mistress about another cavalier of Spain; as a result of which both nearly lost their lives, for no other reason than that they had raised a scandal in presence of the two Queens and the Empress. In the same way Don Carlos of Avalos at *Madrid*, when Queen Isabel of France was passing through the town, only escaped instant execution by rushing into a church, which served as a refuge for the destitute poor. He could only leave it after in disguise, and had then to flee from Spain, whence he was banished for the rest of his life, which he spent in the most miserable island of all Italy, namely *Lipari*.

Even jesters, who have every privilege of speech, suffer for it if they slight ladies; as happened once to one I knew, called Legat. Queen Elizabeth of France,⁴⁷ in the course of a conversation about the beautiful dwellings of *Madrid* and *Valladolid*, said that she could wish these two places close enough together for one to stand with a foot in each, and in saying so, she spread her legs very wide where she stood. At which the jester put in his word, saying, 'And as for me, I could wish to be nicely in the middle, *con un carajo de borrico, para encargar y plantar la raya*—with an ass's lusty pillar, to mark the boundary being planted in it.' For this he was well whipped in the kitchen; though he was not wrong as far as wishing went, for this Queen was one of the most beautiful and charming that ever were in Spain, and full worthy to be desired in this way; not by him indeed, but by men a hundred times more honourable. ¶ I believe that those malicious gentry, the defamers of ladies, would like to have all the privileges enjoyed by the vintagers in the country of *Naples*; who have liberty, so long as the vintage lasts, to shout whatever

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insults and abuse they like at passers by on the roads. You may hear by their ribald clamour what advantage they take of it, sparing none of any rank, whether high or low or middle. But what chiefly pleases them is that ladies are not exempt, not even Princesses; and it is a curious result, as I have heard, that many ladies on this very account find occasion to pass by the vineyard, in order to hear the ribaldry and pick up coarse or indecent sayings, which are bawled at them by the hundred. The peasants banter them on their lascivious enjoyment of husbands or lovers, even accuse them of love-affairs with the very coachmen who are driving them, or with the pages or footmen in attendance; what is more, they ask freely for the favour of the lady's company, promising to leap on her and give her a better doing than any. All this they say openly in the simplest words, without any sort of disguise; and it is allowable for the ladies to laugh their fill & get all the amusement they can of it, as by telling their servants to answer the peasants back, for both sides take the exchange in good part. But once the vintage is gathered there is a truce to such words for another year, which anyone breaking would be prosecuted & severely punished. I am told that the custom still continues, and that many wish it were observed in France at some season of the year, that they might be able in security to vent their spite, as they love so much to do.

¶ Now to sum all up, ladies should be respected by everyone, and their loves and their favours kept secret. That is why Aretino said that when love has gone so far a language grows up between the lover and his lady, whose purpose is not only to please by expression of the pleasure they have in one another, but also and mainly to be a bond between them, and a sign to both members of the school that its secrets are to be kept. Yet there are some husbands so lewd in their outspokenness that not content with the lascivious enjoyment of their wives, they indecently publish an account of it to their friends and companions; for which I have known some women conceive a mortal hatred of their husbands, & consequently refuse those pleasures they had been so pleased to give; for they feel the scandal none the less, though the subject of it is the marriage-bed.

of Gallant Ladies

¶ M. du Bellay, the poet, among those beautiful Latin epitaphs of his, has one for a dog, which seems to me worth quoting here, since it bears on our subject:

*Latratu fures excepi, mutus amantes;
Sic placui domino, sic placui dominæ.
At robbers I would loudly bark,
At lovers wag my tail;
My master thus and mistress both
To please I could not fail.*

If animals then are to be loved for their discretion, what should be done with men who cannot keep their mouths shut? Hear the opinion of one of the famous courtesans of antiquity, and a great mistress of her trade therefore, I mean Lania; she being asked what pleased a woman most in her lover, said discretion in his talk & in his doings discretion. Above all she hated the boastful sort, who would boast of what they had not done, and would not do what they had promised; the latter of which may be taken in two senses. Further, Lamia said that no matter what a woman might do or be, she never liked to be called a harlot or to be known for such. It is said to be a fact that neither did she ever make mock of a man, nor did any man ever make mock or speak ill of her; we may well take a lesson from a lady so experienced in love.

Well, that is enough on this subject; another more eloquent than I might by his embellishments have made more of it, and to such a one I relinquish the sword, which is to say the pen.⁴⁸

THE SEVENTH DISCOURSE
*Of Wives, Widows and Maids; and an Enquiry,
which of these three is hottest in play*

Introduction

ONE DAY WHEN I WAS IN MADRID AT THE Spanish Court I was conversing after the manner of courts with an honourable lady, who put this question to me: *qual era mayor fuego, el de la biuda, el de la casada, o de la hija moca*; which was the greatest fire, that of the widow, that of the wife or that of the young daughter. After I had given her my opinion she gave me hers in some such words as these: '*Lo que me parece d'esta cosa es que, aunque las mocas con el hervor de la sangre se disponen a querer mucho, no deve ser tanto como lo que quieren las casadas y biudas, con la gran experiencia del negocio. Esta razon debe ser natural, como lo seria la del que, por haver nacido ciego de la perfection de la luz, no puede cobdiciar de ella con tanto deseo como el que vio, y fue privado de la vista.*—My opinion on this matter is, that although the young by the heat of their blood are passionately disposed, nevertheless they are not so desirous as wives and widows, who have great experience of the business. This is only a natural effect; in the same way a person who was born blind, & so has never seen the glory of the light, cannot desire it so passionately as one who having seen it, has afterwards been deprived of his sight.' And she added, '*Con menos pena se abstiene d'una cosa la persona que nunca supo, que aquella que vive enamorada del gusto pasado*'; the person who has never known a thing can abstain from it with less difficulty than can a person who revels in the memory of its taste.' Such were the reasons given by this lady for her opinion.

¶ The learned and venerable Boccaccio, in the questions of his Filicopo, makes this the ninth: 'With which of the three, wife, widow or maid, is it best to fall in love, if one would have happy realization of desire?' Boccaccio's answer, which he puts into the mouth of the Queen in the dialogue, is to this effect: that although it were an evil deed, against God and conscience, to desire a married woman, seeing she is not free but is subject to her husband, & though it is consequently more dangerous also, yet she is much the easiest of the three to attain one's end with; for the more a fire is fanned the more it blazes, whereas a fire left to itself goes

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out. The sense of pleasure is the only exception to the rule, that all things decrease by use. Thus the widow, who has been long without the experience loses the sense, and for the pleasures of love cares no more than if she had never been married, for it is memories she glows with rather than desire. The virgin also, who has not made acquaintance with pleasure, except in her imagination, is but lukewarm in her desire for it. But the wife, being continually heated by the practise of love, desires the oftener its repetition; and if by a roving eye she bring on herself the fury of her husband, especially if from words he go on to blows, then she will have another motive in her desire for vengeance (for there is nothing so vengeful as a woman, even in such a relation as this) and she will make him a cuckold in good earnest, thereby satisfying her mind as well as her body. Lord! one wearies of eating always the same meat! for this reason alone great lords and ladies will sometimes leave the delicate dishes provided for them and take a meal at the common table.

But while wives are thus so easy, there is no knowing what time and trouble may be spent on your maids before they can be won to a man's will; and if they are converted to love in the end they do not know it, so unfamiliar are they with their own bodies. With widows it is not so bad, for the old fire soon burns up, so that they desire again in an instant what it needed long abstinence to forget; yet they cannot so quickly recover the sense & realization of pleasure, which they regret to find they have lost in the long cold nights, spent wastefully in the loveless beds of widowhood.

To these arguments of the Queen a gentleman called Ferramont replies; who leaves wives out of the question as too easy to win, not even deigning to argue their case, but proceeding at once to consider maids and widows. Firstly he maintains that the maid is more constant in love than the widow, for the latter in the past has known the secrets of love, so that these have no novelty for her, & she seeks it in a change of lovers; thus she hesitates before choosing any, then promptly desires another, wondering also which association will be most to her profit and honour. In short, the widow's love can never have the character of constancy;

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whereas with the maid it is just the contrary, for love itself is all novelty for her, she has no impulse but to hold the lover she has chosen, & so gives all her mind to pleasing him, thinking nothing so honourable as constancy in love; for it will give her the knowledge she burns for, of things never heard or seen or felt by her, which have no such attraction for women of experience. The maid is so possessed by the desire of knowledge that she will inquire of others about these mysteries, and so the fires in her will be fanned; her only satisfaction is in union with the one who has become lord of her thoughts. There is no such passionate constancy in the widow, who has long ago passed that point.

At this Boccaccio's Queen takes up the argument, and tries to make her reply conclusive, saying that the widow is a hundred times more interested in the pleasures of love, since the maid is occupied with guarding her precious virginity, on which her future honour depends. And even if your virgin consents she is afraid of being hurt, as well as awkward and unskilled in the charming devices which such occasions demand; an objection which cannot be brought against the widow, whom past experience has made bold and cunning in the art, for she has already given and ratified the gift of what the virgin has still to give. Accordingly the widow need have no fear of being examined, for proof of penetration can support no charge against her; also she is acquainted with secret ways of obtaining, & of giving too, what pleasure she would. The virgin is timid, the Queen repeats, of the first assault on her maidenhead; for to some it is more painful and distressing than pleasant; but the widow has no such fear, and surrenders herself sweetly, however rough the assailant may be. Love is the opposite of many pleasures, of which one has enough in one experience and lightly leaves them, whereas this produces ever the desire for its repetition. Hence the widow, in giving less but in giving it often, is a hundred times more generous than the virgin with her constancy, who thinks so long before yielding her treasure. So the Queen concludes that it is better worth while to make love to the widow, who is so much easier to win over and corrupt.

NOW THEN, TO DEVELOP THE ARGUMENT OF Boccaccio! let us take it reason by reason, spell it out as it were, discoursing on it the while after the manner of those honourable gentlemen & ladies whom I have heard so often in Courts discoursing on this subject. I can say from my own experience that whoever wishes an early realization of his love, without great expenditure of time or trouble, should without any doubt address himself to married ladies; for as Boccaccio says, the more a fire is stirred the hotter it blazes. Such is the case of the married woman, who is so heated by her husband that when he has no longer wherewith to quench that fire the poor woman must borrow elsewhere, or verily be burnt alive. I knew a lady of good family, and high in society, who said once to her husband ('twas from him I heard it) that naturally she was not so keen for this pleasure as might be thought—& God knows, there was reason to think it!—for often it would be easy for her to do without it were it not for his coming and stirring the fire; then as he lacked the capacity to damp it down for the day it became necessary for her to run for help to her lover. Often not getting relief even thus, she would retire alone to her closet or her bed, and there assuage her heat as best she could, either in the *Lesbian* manner or by some other artifice. So great sometimes would be her need, she said, that were it not for the shame, she would offer herself to the first man she met in a ball-room, drawing him into any alcove or only to the stairs. In her heat she was like the *Andalusian* mares, who when they cannot find stallions to leap on them, and so can get no relief, turn their parts toward the wind of the plain; which entering in by the gate of nature, fills them with its male virtue & assuages them; thus are begotten those swift horses we have from *Andalusia*, which seem indeed to have inherited the speed of the wind. I expect there are many husbands who would be glad if their wives could find a wind thus to assuage their heat, instead of taking lovers and furnishing their husbands with horns to their shame.

That is a strange characteristic of women which I have mentioned, their not burning without the fire being stirred; but it is less surprising in

the light of the Spanish lady's allegory, who said, *Que quanto mas me quiero sacar de la braza, tanto mas mi marido me abraza en el brazero*; 'the more I wish to take out the embers, the more my husband burns me in my own brazier.' Women may well be kindled in the bed, seeing that at a mere touch, at a word or even a look, when opportunity is favourable they will abandon themselves without consideration for the husband.

To tell the truth, what most often restrains either gail or woman is the fear of a big belly, not got by eating beans; but the wife has no fear of this, for if her belly swells it is of course the husband's doing, and he bears all the responsibility. As for the laws of honour forbidding such liberty, most women, as Boccaccio instances, simply laugh at them; arguing seriously that the laws of nature come first. This goddess, they say, made nothing to no purpose, and these lovely parts were given to them to use and to enjoy, not to leave idle as beggars; on these noble organs no more than on others did nature impose abstinence, on the contrary she forbade them leisure, & would send spiders to weave their webs across pleasure's throne unless ladies found fox-tails to brush them away. And in truth it often happens when nature has to endure this forced idleness that serious illness follows & life is endangered, especially the womb becomes choked, which has led to the death of many fair and honest ladies; and these sad cases were all due to that cursed continence, the right cure according to the physicians being carnal union, if possible with men both strong & big.

The ladies say further, at least some of ours do, that that law of honour is only for those who love not and have taken no honourable lovers; for in such a case it is indecent & reprehensible to surrender one's body, one might as well be a whore. But when ladies love, & have true lovers after their hearts, there is no law of honour against their giving kind relief to these by damping the fires which burn them; for it is like granting life to one who begs it, and they only shew themselves merciful instead of cruel and barbarous; as Régnaud says, whose words I gave above in the story of poor suffering Genevieve. For example I knew a great and honourable lady who was one day found by her lover in her closet translating

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into French verse that stanza spoken by Régnaud which begins: *Una donna deve dunque morire*; the translation was beautiful and the verses as well turned as any I have seen (for I saw them afterwards) and when the lover asked what she had been writing, 'Look!' said the lady, 'here is a translation I have just made, which expresses my own feelings perfectly, and is a judgment in your favour, pronouncing that you shall have satisfaction of your desire, and only awaiting execution.' The lover, after a brief reading, took the hint & proceeded to action; & how much better was that judgment for him than if it had been one of those given in the Court of *La Tournelle*! I can assure you, though Régnaud's speech was enriched by Ariosto with many beautiful thoughts, the lady reproduced all faithfully in her translation, which was fully as moving as the original; and to her lover it was a clear message that she wished to grant him his life and not to be inexorable, of which he did not fail to take advantage.

And why should not a lady whom nature has made good and merciful use freely the gifts she has been given? 'twere ingratitude to that kindly mother to repudiate her gifts, or to oppose her at all. This was the idea of a lady I have heard of, who seeing her husband one day walking up and down the hall, could not help saying to her lover: 'Look at the strut of our good man, is he not a perfect figure of a cuckold? Sure, I should commit an offence against nature were I to give her the lie in this matter, when she has so clearly proclaimed his destiny!'

¶ I heard of another lady who complained of her husband that he ill-treated and jealously spied on her, suspecting that she was making him a set of horns. 'It is too good!' she laughed to her lover, 'he thinks his fire is equal to mine; & the fact is I can put out his in a twinkling, with a few drops of water as it were, while the furnace in me needs to be played on continually. We women are like persons with dropsy, who the more water they swallow only want the more, or we are like a sandy ditch.'

¶ Better still was the comparison used by another, who said that a woman's other self was like a chicken, which dies of the pip if it gets not enough water to drink; only in this case it must be other than spring-water.

of Gallant Ladies

Another lady said she was like a garden, which is not content with the rain of heaven, but needs to be watered by the gardener if it is to look its best. Another said that she meant to follow the example of a good manager, who does not invest all his wealth in a single concern, but distributes it among several; for a single could not use it so as to give the best return. By thus distributing her loves she would get the best value for her property, and herself would be the better for it.

¶ I was told of an honourable lady, who had a very ugly lover and a very handsome husband. When a friend remonstrated with her on this & asked why she did not choose a better-looking lover, 'Don't you know,' she replied, 'that to cultivate a field more than one labourer is needed; also that handsome and refined men are not the fittest, but good sturdy rustics?' There was another lady of my acquaintance, who having an ugly & awkward husband, chose a lover as ugly as him; & when a friend asked why, she said, 'The better to accustom me to my husband's ugliness.'

¶ Another lady, discoursing one day of love, said with reference to herself and her companions, 'If women were always chaste they would never hear the case for the contrary;' in which she was only quoting the Emperor Heliogabulus, who said that one half of life should be devoted to virtue and the other half to vice; for if a person were entirely good or entirely wicked he or she would never hear the case for the contrary, which is needed to give temper to the character.' I have known distinguished persons to approve of this maxim, especially in its application to women. Barba,' for example, wife of the Emperor Sigismund, said that to be always in the state of chastity was the sign of a fool; she even made it an offence for her ladies, married or unmarried, to persist in this folly, which she herself certainly could not be accused of. For all her pleasure was in feasting and dancing and love, and in such persons as were devoted to the same; she had nothing but mockery for those who fasted to mortify the flesh, or who lived retired lives. I leave you to imagine whether or no there were good times in the Court of this Emperor & Empress; I mean for gentlemen and ladies who loved the pleasures of love.

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¶ I heard tell of an honourable lady of high repute who fell ill of the sore love she felt for her cavalier; all because she would not put to the hazard that treasure she bore between her legs, out of regard for the law of honour so preached and insisted on by husbands. Day by day she endured the parching fire till she saw herself becoming thin and dried up & drooping instead of fresh & plump as before; at last she was so shocked by the vision in her mirror that she exclaimed: 'What! shall it be said that in the flower of my life, all for a silly scruple about a mere point of honour, I slowly withered up through stifling of my flame; that I consumed away and grew old and ugly before my time, not caring for the lustrous beauty which won me love and honour; that instead of a creature of warm and lovely flesh I become a carcase, a skeleton rather, to be pointed at in every company, or to be banished altogether amid mocking laughter? Never let it be said! the remedy is in my power & I shall use it.' She was as good as her word, and gave herself joyfully to her lover and to the good remedy; with the result that she recovered her figure and became beautiful as before. Nor did her husband ever guess the manner of her cure, but attributed it all to the physicians, whom he thanked and sang their praises everywhere for having thus restored her for his better enjoyment.

¶ I heard of another great lady of a quick fancy & very witty in speech who once when she was ill was told by her physician that she would never be well unless she did the deed; whereupon she replied promptly, 'Come on, then, let us to it!' So the physician and she gave one another joy of heart and body. A while afterwards she said to him, 'They say everywhere that you do it with me; but that is your proper business, since it cures me!' only she used more freely a very naughty word. 'As my health depends on it,' she added, 'I shall do it all I can.'

¶ The last two were not like that honourable lady of *Pampeluna* of whom I have spoken in a previous discourse, and who also appears in the Hundred Novels of the Queen of Navarre. She being desperately in love with M. d'Avannes, preferred to hide and to nurse in her bosom the flame that was consuming her, aye and to die of it, rather than lose her honour.

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According to the opinions of certain honourable lords and ladies above-mentioned, she was a fool for her pains; and what is more, she thought very little of the safety of her soul, seeing that she compassed her own death, for she could have saved herself but refused, and that on a trifling account. Yes, trifling indeed, for as an old French proverb says, 'A blade of grass cut or a is no lasting damage.' What is the difference, after it is done? The need, once satisfied, like any other, cries not to the world. I assume that there has been due secrecy, everything done behind closed doors; what sign then is shewn of it? Does the lady walk less upright, for example? Look at the great ladies of this Court or of others, for it is in such that love most often makes his lodging, or as this lady of *Pampeluna* put it, it is on great portals that greatest winds beat; look at them and tell me, for I am acquainted with many of these ladies, do they cease to walk with head erect, or in any way fail to shew as bold a front as Bradamant or Marfisa? Where is the man who would presume to challenge their purity? Not even their husbands, I tell you, or at any rate not all, would dare to question them, so haughty can be the demeanour of the skilled dissembler.

But perhaps the lady has had no thought of deceiving him, then if the husband demands explanations or becomes the least abusive in his language he is a lost man; for immediately her thoughts turn to revenge, & she will justify his worst suspicions. There is an old proverb which says, 'When a husband beats his wife, she laughs with her other mouth,' meaning that this part of her foresees good times, knowing the nature of its mistress and owner. For, having no other weapons to her hand, she will get satisfaction of her husband in a duel with her lover, in which that feature will be her good friend and second; no doubt but it will happen, whatever watch and ward the husband may keep on her.

To attain her ends, the best means a woman has is to take another into her confidence, if it is only her chamber-maid; who may help to get her new lovers if she lacks them, and if not, may help to arrange meetings; at which she must keep watch, lest the husband or any other appear on the

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scene. Therefore ladies are wont to bribe their maids, either by money and presents or by promises; often there is a contract between mistress and maid, that after every third meeting with the lover, the maid shall have a half or at least a third of whatever present he has given the mistress. But the worst of it is, that often the mistress cheats the maid of her portion, pretending that the lover has only given her so small a present, that it is not worth dividing; thus they put off the poor serving-girls with bay berries for plums, though they were faithful sentinels when on guard. This is an injustice which ought to be exposed! for if the case were tried, with pleaders advancing the arguments on each side, and witnesses called, we should have a great debate and plenty to laugh at; myself I should be prosecutor, & insist that it is flat robbery to deprive the poor creatures of their covenanted portion! But there are other ladies who keep faithfully to the agreement, cheating their maids of nothing in order that they may be the better served by them; in which they do as the good managers of shops, who render to their employers (or it may be to partners) a fair share of the profits from trading. These ladies deserve indeed to be well served, since they give recognition to the trouble taken by their maids, not to mention the risks they run. I heard of one who was keeping watch one day while her mistress entertained a lover in her bed-room, and the husband's house-steward caught her and gave it to her hot, saying that her place was in her mistress' room, not playing mackerel outside, and he would inform the master of the ill service she was doing him. But the lady won him over by means of another of her chamber-maids, to whom he was making love; at her mistress' request this one promised to gratify him, also that he should have a present from her mistress, and so the steward was appeased. But the lady never liked him after, & kept a sharp eye on his doings till she detected him at last in a theft; then seizing the opportunity, she got her husband to dismiss him.

¶ I know of a fair and honest lady^r who took a servant into her confidence, & treated her rather as a friend, permitting her great familiarities, for she had trained her well for such intercourse. Sometimes when the

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lady's husband had been long from home, it might be on a journey or detained at Court, this woman would look slyly at her beautiful mistress as she dressed her, & then say: 'Heigho! is he not an unfortunate man, who has such a beautiful wife and has to leave her alone so long, without so much as a sight of her? But could he indeed not come if he would? I am not sure but he deserves to be made a cuckold straight away! That is what you ought to do, Madam; I know that if I were as beautiful as you, and my husband stayed away so long, I'd pay him so.' I leave you to imagine whether or no the lady found this a sweet nut to crack; no trouble at all, here were crackers to hand in this woman's inclination to help, here were shoes for her feet when she should wish to walk.

Again there are ladies who cover their loves by getting a servant to act a part with the lover, so that the husband may suspect nothing; thus if he find the lover in his wife's room she can always say that he has come there to make love to such and such a maid of hers; which works very well for the lady, as it is hard to know the truth in such a case. I knew a great Prince who began by making love to a lady-in-waiting of the Princess he desired, in order to discover what secret loves she had, and so know what stood between her and himself.

I have known many such schemes in my life, but an opposite case was that of an honourable lady of fashion, who was lucky enough to have as lovers three gallant gentlemen in turn; to whom she said pleasantly afterwards, when they had left her to become lovers of a great Princess. 'Did I not train you well, did I not give you a good grounding in love, since you have qualified as cavaliers to so great a lady? Now the final polish is being put on your education; but to rise so high it was necessary first to sit in the lower classes, as is the rule in all arts and sciences.'

This did her great honour; which reminds me of another lady, who was in attendance on a Princess. Her mistress was surprised one day in her room by her husband, just as she was receiving a note from her lover, and was lost but for the timely aid of this lady I speak of; who quickly taking the note & slipping it into her mouth swallowed it whole, without

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the husband noticing anything. That may be called a noble service; and I am glad to say that the great lady never forgot her obligation.

On the other hand I know of ladies who have suffered for putting too much trust in their servants, no less than others have for not trusting them enough. There was a fair & honest lady who had taken as her lover one of the most brave and accomplished gentlemen of France, to give him joy and pleasure of her sweet body. But she would not trust the secret to one of her women; so when she and her lover went to spend a night together in a friend's house, it was arranged that a single-bed should be prepared for her, but no other in her room, so that her women should all have to sleep in the ante-room. This plan was carried out, and the lover was introduced secretly into the bed-room; but they found unexpectedly a cat-hole in the door between the two rooms, which they decided on the spur of the moment to stop with a loose board; which would fall if any one gave the door a push, and the noise of it give them warning.

All might have been well but for one of the women, who was accustomed to sleep in her mistress' room, & who suspected that there was an eel under this stone. Being vexed at her mistress withholding the trust, which to her in particular she had given hitherto, this woman set herself to peep and listen at the chinks of the door, as soon as her mistress had gone to bed. Soon she heard a murmur of talk, and knew well that it was not the reading aloud which her mistress for the last few evenings had practised in bed; this being a plan of hers to avert suspicion should the sound of voices be heard on this night. The woman became more curious to know all, and just at this moment an opportunity presented itself, for a kitten chanced to come into the room; she & her companions quickly caught it and pushed it forcibly through the cat-hole into their mistress' room, knocking down the board which was set in front of it and making a nice clatter. The lover and the lady in alarm started up in bed, but saw by the light of the candle that it was only a cat, which had sprung the trap in coming through. So without troubling themselves further they lay down again, for as it was late and everyone likely to be asleep they

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thought there was no need to close the hole; also it would allow the cat to go out, which they did not want to have shut up with them till morning. This gave the woman outside the chance she wanted, for she was able to see and hear all the doings of her mistress; & these she afterwards recounted to the husband, with the result that the lover lost his life and the lady her reputation. That is what comes of failing to trust & appreciate servants, an error one sometimes fall into, and for which one may pay as dearly as for the opposite one of indiscretion.

¶ For example I know of a great nobleman who once took all the chamber-maids of his wife, a fair and honest lady, and was actually about to have them tortured, to get from them a confession of any help they had given his wife in her love-affairs; it was only to avoid even greater scandal that he stopped short of this cruelty. His first information had come from a lady who had a grudge against the wife, I will not give her name; a judgment from Heaven fell on her afterwards.

¶ My last word on the subject of wives is that there is none like them for giving real value, & that quickly; for they are so well up in the business that the sharpest and most hawk-like of husbands will be deceived by them. But on this I have said enough in the discourse on cuckolds, where good stories in plenty will be found, so that I need not add more here.

FOLLOWING THE ORDER OF BOCCACCIO, OUR GUIDE in this discourse, I come now to maids. Of these it must be admitted that they are by nature very timid at first, not daring to abandon what they hold so dear; for the continual admonitions of parents and governesses ring in their ears, with the terrible threats that have accompanied them. On this account, though desire may be ever so strong in them, they unsex themselves all they can. Often indeed they would taste of the feast were it not for dread of that malicious belly, which is always ready to raise an accusation against them. Still there are some who do not pay such heed, but shutting their eyes to all the consequences, rush in boldly, with head down I was going to say, but it should rather be with head turned away. These do very wrong, for the scandal of a maid seduced is the greatest of all, much more serious than attaches to a wife's or a widow's frailty. No name is thought bad enough for the maid who loses the treasure of her virginity; all point at her the finger of scorn, and her chance of a good marriage is gone. So at least one would think, yet I have often known it to happen that some reckless fellow has presented himself, either in ignorance of the case or under constraint, sometimes indeed willingly as if attracted by the disgrace, and has thrown himself into the breach most literally, cheerfully marrying the maid all soiled as she is.

Many such cases have I known, the most remarkable being one in which a girl had become big by the act of a certain Prince, and would take no trouble to avoid the scandal of her condition. When taxed with it, she answered simply: 'What have I to conceal? there is nothing blameworthy in the act itself, nor in the body's desire for it; I only lacked the prudence to cheat nature. Had I been as clever and calculating as my comrades, who have done as much and more than I, but took care to avoid the natural consequence, I should not be in my present trouble, for nothing would be known of it.' Her comrades hated her for saying this, and she was dismissed by their mistress; of whom it was said however, that she had ordered the girl to yield to the Prince, hoping by this means to get control over him. The point of the story is, that in spite of

this disgrace the girl after a while made a wealthy marriage; and it was the source of an illustrious line. See now, if this girl had been as cunning as her comrades or as many others, there would have been no such good result. Bless me! I have known girls as cunning in these matters as wives however long married; yes, & have known them to be most accomplished mackerels, not contenting themselves with their own pleasures, but procuring for others.

¶ It was an unmarried girl of our Court who both wrote and staged that pretty comedy entitled *The Paradise of Love*; which was given in the Bouillon chamber, there being none present but the actors and actresses, who served also as audience. Those who know the piece will understand why! There were three male characters and three female, the hero being a Prince, who had his Princess of course, but dearly loved a great lady not quite of such high rank as himself. Then there was a lord who made love to the same great lady, this providing rich entertainment; lastly there was a gentleman to court the lady-in-waiting, whom he married in the end; for the fair authoress must needs be represented in her own play, where she could shew things as they ought to be! As it is customary for authors either to take a part or to speak the prologue, this one took the part of herself; and girl though she was played as well or even better than the married women, with all their experience of love's paradise. Ah! but she had studied humanity in other countries than her own, had been as the Spaniards say *refinada en Secobia*, finished in *Segovia*; a proverb that arose from the fact that cloth is sent to *Segovia* to have the highest finish put on it.

¶ I have heard stories of many young women who while serving their mistresses as Dariolettes, or confidential aids, wished themselves to taste of the feast. Often in such cases they become tyrants of their mistresses, who go in dread of their secrets being given away by them as in the story told above. It was a serving-maid whom I heard saying one day, that it was great folly in girls to imagine the seat of honour between their legs, for in love there was no question of honour but only of scandal; others

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might be foolish enough to have scruples, but honour for her would consist in keeping her pleasures secret. There were good ways of ensuring this, she said, & any girl who did not avail herself of them was unworthy of the privilege of living!

¶ A certain Spanish lady, thinking that her daughter had fears about the first night of marriage, proceeded to re-assure her; saying that though the operation might be forcible, the pain was nothing to speak of, & she would gladly take her place for the night. To which the daughter replied, '*Bezo las manos, senora madre, de tal merced, que bien la tomare yo pore mi*; I kiss your hands, lady mother, in thanks for such a service, but can well perform it for myself.'

¶ I heard a story of a girl of very high lineage, whom it was proposed to marry, as she had already been helping herself to such pleasures; & the husband chosen for her lived in Spain. In reference to this, one of her secret lovers said to her playfully one day that he was surprised at her making a voyage toward the setting sun, after she had so loved the rising; and he slyly stressed this last word. To which the lady replied with verve, 'Yes, I have heard old sailors say that a voyage toward the rising is very pleasant; & I have made a few myself, by the guidance of a compass that I always carry with me, and which I hope will still guide me to the rising, when I find myself in the quarter of the setting sun.' Good scholars will be able to interpret this allegory, without any gloss from me; and I leave you to judge from it, if this lady was much given to telling her beads.

¶ I heard the name of another lady, who expressed herself very frankly after hearing an account of the city of *Venice*; what struck her most was not the marvel of its building, but the liberty enjoyed there by persons of all sorts & especially by courtesans. 'Ah, my God!' said she to one of her comrades, 'why do we not transfer thither all our wealth by letters of credit and go ourselves to live the happy life of courtesans, with which none other can compare? 'twere better than to be Empress of the world!' That was a gay wish! and in truth I believe that those who have the inclination to this life would not change it for any other.

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¶ Another wish that pleases me is that made by the lady in times past, who was listening to the story of a poor slave, recently escaped out of the hands of the Turks. First he told her all the cruel tortures they had practised on him, and on all Christian prisoners; then she asked him what they did to women. 'Alas, Madam!' said he, 'they do them and do them till they die of it.'—'Would to God,' cried the lady, 'I could so die a martyr to the Faith!'

¶ I know of three great ladies, one of them unmarried, who being together one day, began making wishes. The first said, 'I wish I had an apple-tree that would bear as many apples of gold every year as it bore natural fruit.' The second said, 'I wish I had a meadow of the same kind, that would produce as many precious stones as it did flowers.' The third, who was the maid, said, 'I wish I had a dove-cot whose entrances were each worth as much to me as the entrance of a certain lady, whom I shall not name, but only say that she is a King's favourite; as to my own, I hope there will be more pigeons coming to it than to hers!'

¶ A very different case was that of a Spanish lady, whom you may read of in the history of that country. One day, when the great Alfonzo, King of Aragon, was making a state entry into the town of *Saragossa*, she threw herself on her knees before him and demanded justice. When the King consented to hear her she asked if she might speak to him apart, which he granted also. Then she made her complaint, and what she begged was relief from her husband, who would lie with her thirty-two times in the course of a day and a night, so that she had neither rest nor freedom; on hearing which the King sent for the husband, who admitted the fact, and claimed that his rights were unlimited where his wife was concerned. The King then summoned his council to deliberate on the case, & the result was a decree limiting the husband to six embraces in the twenty-four hours. At the same time the King expressed a two-fold astonishment, firstly at the extraordinary heat and potency of the man, and secondly at the extraordinary coldness and continence of the woman, so contrary to the nature of her sex; for usually the woman is on her knees beseeching

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husband or lover to give her more, and only complains when these give to others what belongs to herself.

¶ More like a woman was the complaint of a young bride, a girl of good family, who the morning after the wedding was recounting her experiences to her comrades, and spoke in this strain: 'What! is that all? And you told me, you and other women, yes and those strutting men too, with their promises of mountains and marvels of love, my faith! what did you not all tell me? & now this man who was so hot in courtship, this champion tilter at the ring if one were to believe him, how many tilts did he run last night? my faith, but four in all! the usual three for the ring and one for the ladies, I suppose! And Lord! in the intervals of his four he did more self-satisfied posing and posturing than was to be seen last evening among all the dancers at the ball.' Probably, as she thought four such short rations, she would have liked a round dozen; but we are not all like the Spanish gentleman in the last story.

¶ Well, that is how ladies make fun of their husbands; and if they do not now they will later, like the lady in a story I will now tell. The night of her wedding, when her husband wished to make his first assault, she resisted stubbornly; till he tricked her by saying that this was only his little dagger, and if he were to take a big one that he had she would have real cause to cry out. Frightened by this threat she surrendered without more ado; but in the morning she turned the tables on him, for she professed not to be satisfied with the little dagger, and called on him to stab her with the big one he had spoken of. When the husband answered that he had no other, but had only been fooling her, she pouted and said, 'Is it right to disappoint poor simple girls in this way?' Then he spoke sharply and said she must be content with what nature had provided; but it was he who looked foolish in the end. For my part, I am not sure whether to put this girl down as a simpleton or as a cunning one who had been there before; it is a nice question, which I must leave to more subtle clerks.

¶ An even greater show of simplicity was made by another girl, in her answer to a magistrate, before whom she charged a gallant with raping

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her.' The defendant being examined, answered: 'Your Worship, I challenge her to deny that with her own hand she took my person and put it into her own.'—'That is true, Your Worship,' said the girl, 'but who would not have done the same? For after he had thrown me on my back and pulled up my clothes, he thrust himself against me, prodding me till I was afraid he would make a hole; save us! wasn't it time to take it and put it in the hole that nature had made?' Now was this girl a simpleton or did she act the part? I leave it to my readers to decide.

¶ I have stories of two married ladies, each as simple as that girl, or as cunning, whichever you like to think. The first was a very great lady of my acquaintance, much desired for her beauty. One day a great Prince made ardent love to her, promising her most liberal treatment, rank and riches both for herself and for her husband; to which sweet temptation she sweetly lent her ear. Yet she held back from the actual surrender, until like a simpleton, like any young wife all innocent of the world, she had told everything to her husband and asked his advice. The husband cried in horror, 'Nay, nay, sweetheart! what are you thinking of, what are you talking of? Jesus! an infamous thing, that could never be undone by you or me!'—'Ah! but think,' replied the lady, 'we should both be such great persons that nothing could be said against us.' Well, the husband would not be persuaded; but the lady could not resign herself to losing such a lover, and after awhile she grew bold and began scheming, till she found means to have the Prince secretly; aye and others besides, once she had put aside her foolish simplicity. I heard this story from one who had it direct from the Prince; my informant had heard the lady tell it too, and had taken occasion to warn her against consulting a husband on any matter of the sort, for he is always a prejudiced party.

The second lady would seem to have been quite as simple, to judge by her behaviour one day that an honourable gentleman made advances to her; which he did with great boldness though her husband was in the room, being engaged at the moment in conversation with another lady. He went so far as to put his sparrow-hawk into the lady's hand, or to speak

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plainer his person; which she took and gripped firmly, then turning to her husband said, 'Look, my dear, what a beautiful present this gentleman has offered me! tell me, should I accept it?' The poor gentleman was flabbergasted, and drew back his sparrow-hawk so hurriedly that it was caught by a diamond in a ring she was wearing, which tore the skin down its whole length; he was lucky not to lose it altogether, and his life too; as it was he suffered great pain, & could only stagger to the door, sprinkling the room with jets of blood as he went. So the husband had no need to pursue & attack him, he only burst out laughing, both at the simplicity of his little dear with her beautiful present & at the fate which had overtaken the bold gentleman.

¶ I must tell a village tale now, but it is not a coarse one. The occasion was the wedding of a village lass, who was being escorted to the church with tabor and pipe, and much pretty ceremony. Just then she caught sight of her lover that had been, & to him she cried out, 'Goodbye, Peter! I'll not be able to give you any more of it, my mother is marrying me. Goodbye!' Her regret for the past was as quaint as her innocence.

¶ Here is another, since we are on the village. A pretty young girl took a load of wood to the market; and whenever she was offered a price, she asked for a higher bid, till a dealer shouted at her, 'You shall have what you ask and something else into the bargain!'—'Done with you!' cried she, 'you would not have got it for the money, but now you have outbid them all!'

These were very simple girls and women, but there are plenty like them, just as there are plenty of their opposite; I mean those sharp ones, who never ask advice of their husbands, nor shew the beautiful presents they receive!

¶ I heard a story in Spain of a girl who made fun of her husband on the night of her wedding; for when he was struggling and striving to force an entrance, and hurting himself not a little, she said to him with a laugh, '*Señor, bien es razon que seays martyr, pues que io soy virgen; mas pues que io tomo la paciencia, bien la podeys tomar.*' It is right, Sir, that you should be a

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martyr, since I am a virgin; and as I have practised patience, so should you be able to.' Thus she avenged many a woman who has been mocked by her husband; but many like her might well make fun of their husbands on the first night, whether because they knew all about it before, or because being innocent they have been led to expect so much, have dreamt of such a paradise of pleasure, & now this fumbling is all their husbands have to offer them. Another Spanish lady, the morning after her wedding, was singing the praises of her husband to some friends, but mentioned one objection, *que no era buen contador aritmetico, porque no sabia multiplicar*; that he was not good at arithmetic, because he did not know how to multiply.

¶ I knew a girl of good family, who gave her friends a laugh on her wedding night. They had gathered outside the door as usual to listen, and when the husband had rested a little after his first inroad, they heard him ask her if she would like more of it; to which she answered sweetly, 'As often as you would, Sir.' Well might the surprised husband rub his ears, to find her so much at home!

When a girl is so ready with repartee on her wedding night, the husband may expect heavier blows to follow; for it is likely that he is not the first who has dropped anchor in that bay, neither will he be the last. Unless a husband works himself to death with the crowbar, and as a good sapper fairly undermines his wife, she will be off and making horns for him; that is a certainty, as witness the old French proverb, 'Stint her at all and she will seek it abroad.' But Heaven help us! when a woman sets herself to get all she can out of a man she is merciless, she murders him! Hence the old saying, that a lover should be spared & not so much taken out of him as the lady would like, but that a husband should be drained of his very marrow. Of which we hear an echo in the Spanish epigram, *que el primero pensamiento de la muger, luego que es casada, es de embiudarse*; that a woman's first thought as soon as she is married is to make herself a widow.

¶ There are certain young ladies, not able to contain their desires, who

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yet will not take as lovers any but Princes or great lords; who certainly are the most desirable sort for a girl to be tumbled by, not only for sake of their presents & their goodwill, but also for the pleasure she may take in their refinement. For everything about them is beautiful, and themselves always accomplished, even if sometimes we have to call them fops. Other girls on the contrary shun them like the plague, because they are reputed to be heedless of scandal, always ready to sacrifice the lady for sake of a boast; therefore these ladies let the grandeur go, & seek a gentleman prudent and discreet; ah! lucky is she who finds such a one, for they are rare birds. Some get over the difficulty by taking a lackey as lover, some of whom are handsome if others are not; yes, I myself know ladies who have taken this course. There is no trouble about attracting a lackey; he is there when his mistress gets up or goes to bed, takes off and puts on her shoes; indeed, I have known plenty of young ladies at Court who let their lackeys hand them their chemises, without feeling the least embarrassment. So it is likely enough that the fellows, from getting so many charming glimpses, already burn with desire; and if a lady choose to let them see a little more than she need, is it not natural after the eyes have done their work that other parts of the body should come in & do theirs? ¶ I knew a young lady of fashion, beautiful if ever one was, who made her lackey the rival of a great Prince, when the latter thought he alone was her happy possessor; aha! he ran in double harness with the lackey. But the lady was fastidious all the time, for the lackey was handsome both of face and figure; and when in bed and at his duties there, it was hard to know him from the Prince, whom he even surpassed in certain graces. Of this affair the Prince only got knowledge when he left the lady on his marriage; & then he bore no grudge against the man, but thought of it with amusement any time he saw him, saying to himself, 'And was this man really my rival? I can well believe it, for rank apart, he is my superior.' By a curious coincidence, the man had the same name as the Prince. At Court he was famous as a tailor; and there was hardly a lady, married or unmarried, that he was not called in to dress, when she wished

to look her very best. I don't know though, if he dressed them in the same manner as he did his mistress, but they might have done much worse. ¶ I knew a girl of good family who had a lackey aged fourteen, whom she treated as a jester to amuse her. Among other jokes she used to let him kiss her and stroke her body, as familiarly as if he had been a woman; she saw not the least objection, letting him do it before company, and explaining that he was just an amusing fool. I cannot say if he went any further, but this I do know, that afterwards as wife and widow, and in a second marriage too, she was a most eminent whore. You may be pretty sure then that the match she used in her later minings and bombardments was lit from this brand. It was a year before I discerned this girl's character; at last I saw her at home with her mother, and it was then I predicted that her innocent games would lead to something serious, and that my young lady would one day be just such a glutton as in fact she turned out; for I saw that she was the double of her mother, who was known to be one of the greatest hypocrites of the day, and now pretended to be too pure to suspect any harm in these games.

¶ I knew two sisters of a good family of *Poitou*, both unmarried, who were the occasion of much talk; for they used to take lessons in dancing from a great lackey of their father's. He was a Basque, and certainly a good dancer, not only of his native reels but of all other steps; & he went on to teach them the harlot's reel, till there was a nice scandal. All the same they did not fail to marry well after, for they were rich; and much is forgiven to the rich, who will be accepted though they be even hotter than these two. I knew this Basque afterwards in the army, and a good soldier he was, who shewed by his manners that he had been very well connected, as indeed he was in more senses than one; the young ladies' father, to hush up the scandal had dismissed him, and he had joined M. d'Estrozze's regiment of Guards.

¶ I had the entry to another great house, of which the mistress interested herself in bringing up young ladies, some of them being relations of her husband. But the lady was an invalid & much in the hands of physicians

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and apothecaries, who swarmed about the house. Now young ladies are subject to many ailments, as loss of colour through poverty of blood and fevers of one sort and another; thus it happened that one of them was taken with a quartan ague and was given into the care of an apothecary to dose. He dosed her, sure enough, with the usual drugs and medicine; but the chief part of his treatment was to get into bed with her; ha! the rascal, and her as fair and honest a lady as was in France, worthy to be the mistress of a great King! I knew the girl well myself; and when I think of Master Apothecary putting his trash into her, well! she certainly deserved someone better than that. Yet she married well after; not that she became more prudent, for it was a case of 'Like maid like wife.'

In choosing the apothecary I think she shewed cunning; for when as a consequence she found she could not hold her water, the dreaded sign, she was able to get from her lover such drugs as would undo the mischief he had done. There are plenty of them so expert in these matters that they can either give a drug to prevent pregnancy, or if it is too late for that, can induce a miscarriage with so little trouble that nothing is ever suspected, and the swelling is put down to wind. Yes, it may even have gone so far as to be visible; such was the case with a girl I have heard of, who had been brought up as a maid of honour to the late Queen Margaret of Navarre. She had the misfortune to become pregnant, and supposed there was no remedy for it until she met a clever apothecary; she was then six months gone, but he gave her a potion which caused the womb to drop its fruit, & that without pain or trouble; for it came away gradually, and she was able to continue at her duties all the time. Afterwards she married happily, nor did the husband find any trace of the affair.

The wizardry of medicine! they have even drugs to restore the maidenhead, or at least to counterfeit it. I gave instances in my discourse on cuckoldry, and only the other day I heard a recipe from a quack: you must take leeches & apply them in that sheath which nature has prepared for the bridegroom, where their sucking will raise little blisters or bubbles

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of blood, and these being burst in the gallant doings of the wedding night will pour down their blood to the satisfaction of both parties. Thus *l'onor della cittadella è salvo*, the honour of the citadel is saved! I call it a simple and a sovereign remedy, if indeed it works; but if not, there are plenty of proved remedies, for our respected friends the physicians & apothecaries are always applying their learning, as well as their natural wit, to the invention and perfection of such devices. That is why these gentlemen are often found to be so prosperous; they have power both to wound and to heal, even as the fabled lance of Peleus.

I was acquainted with that apothecary I have just spoken of, and must say a word or two more about him before I pass on. It was in *Geneva* I met him, the first time I went to Italy; for that was the route commonly taken by the French, through Switzerland & the Grisons, while the war lasted. He came to see me in my lodging. Suddenly I asked him what he was doing in that town; was he there to doctor young ladies, the way he had done in France? to which he answered that he was there to do penance for such ways. 'What,' said I, 'do you no longer eat those tasty morsels?'—'Ah, Sir!' he answered, 'God has called me, I am enlightened by his spirit and have the knowledge of his Holy Word.'—'But you were a Protestant in those days,' I said, 'and you managed to combine the doctoring of souls and bodies, choosing young ladies chiefly to preach to and instruct.'—'Sir,' he persisted, 'I am now better acquainted with my God, and wish to sin no more.' I need not give all the conversation we had on the subject, part of which was serious and part in jest; the fact remains, that the rascal previously was not afraid of poison when he swallowed that titbit which was more worthy of an honourable gentleman; & wise he was to be quick out of the house and away, else it would have gone badly with him. Cursed be he, such hate and envy do I feel for him! as M. de Ronsard said of a physician, who came night and morning to see his mistress, more to be feeling her breast and nipple, her belly and flank and rounded shoulder, than to treat her for the fever she had. He made a charming sonnet of it, which is in his second book of Loves; it begins:

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*What hatred and what envy in me start
At coming of the doctor with such zest,
To pass his hand unchallenged o'er the breast,
The belly and the flank of my sweetheart!*⁴

I felt myself a like jealousy of a physician who used to examine a great lady that I loved, and with whom I was allowed no such familiarities, though they would have been more to me than a small kingdom. Those gentry are much welcomed by women and maids, and if they are adventurously inclined have many happy chances. I knew two physicians at Court, one the Queen-mother's, who was called M. Castellan, and the other the Lord Cabrian, who was physician to M. de Nevers, after holding the same post with Ferdinand of Gonzague. Both of them had love affairs with patients, so the story went; and to have been their rivals in those particular affairs some of the greatest gentlemen would have gladly gone to the Devil, as we say.

We were talking one day, the late Baron of Vitaux' and I, with M. le Grand, a famous physician of Paris and an entertaining companion, who had been called in by the Baron, then suffering for his excesses in love. We both questioned him on subjects connected with women, & my faith! he gave us plenty of information, & told us a dozen stories which fairly opened our eyes; he himself was so absorbed in them that he forgot the time. When nine o'clock struck he sprang from his chair, saying, 'Upon my word I am worse than you two, who have kept me here two good hours in frivolous talk, while six or seven patients were waiting for me to visit them. With a hurried goodbye he was making for the door, but we cried, 'Ah, you doctors! you know some good things & practise them too; especially you, Sir, who discourse of gallantry as a master!' He stopped then, & answered with bowed head, 'To my funeral bid the ladies now! It is true we doctors know secrets that are hidden from the rest of the world, but now that I am old, I have said goodbye to Venus and her boy; I leave all that to you youngsters.'

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¶ There is another class of men who have often corrupted girls, the tutors who are engaged to teach them letters. Most thorough tutors they can be, if they are wickedly disposed; for in the course of lessons, being alone with their pupils in schoolrooms what opportunities they have! Think of the stories and fables they can bring into the course for the purpose of inflaming a girl; they have only to watch for the moment when desire has mastered her & then to seize the opportunity as well they know how.

I knew a girl of very good family who was ruined and became a whore as a result of hearing from her tutor the history, or rather the fable, of Tiresias. He was supposed to have been successively of both sexes, and so was chosen by Jupiter and Juno to settle a dispute between them, as to whether the man or the woman in the act of love feels the greater pleasure. He declared that it is the woman; but this was contrary to the opinion of Juno, who was so vexed at having judgment given against her that she deprived the poor judge of his sight and he was blind ever after. It is no great wonder that the girl was tempted by the story, for she had often heard older women say of men, how they burned for that pleasure, & now according to Tiresias the pleasure was even greater for women; when she talked it over with her companions, they all decided that it was a pleasure to be tried. A nice effect such lessons have on girls! But ask their masters if there are no others to give them, and they will say that the young ladies are so eager for knowledge they will not consent to skip a page if such stories occur in the course of a lesson; what is more, they want to have everything explained, unless the story is so blunt as to explain itself. It is worse to insist on turning the page, for when they are told that the passage is indecent, instantly they become more curious than ever, and give the master no peace till he has explained all in detail; for it is their nature to want to do what they are forbidden, and to want to know what one would hide from them. How many fair pupils may have been led astray by that very story of Tiresias! and think of the story of Biblis, and of Caunus, and many of the same kind that are to be met with in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, not to mention his *Art of Loving*! If

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we include the other Latin and the Greek poets, and such of the Italian and the Spanish and the French as are reckoned classics, the way of a scholar is fairly beset with lascivious tales & dialogues. Hence the Spanish saying, '*De una mula que haza hin, y de una hija que hable latin, libera nos Domine*;' from a whinnying mule and from a daughter knowing Latin, good Lord deliver us.' God knows, when a master meaning mischief gives such lessons to a girl, adding spice of his own to the stories to make them more exciting, the chastest in the world might well be seduced. Was not Saint Augustine himself moved to sympathy on reading of the love & death of Dido in the fourth book of the *Æneid*, & did he not grieve for the fair sinner? To take another book, I only wish I had as many crowns as there have been young women, religious as well as worldly, whose passions were aroused, even to the loss of their virginity, by the reading of *Amadis of Gaul*. Think then, what mischief may have been done by Greek and Latin writers, with commentary and glosses added by some foxy teacher in his idle moments, while he leered to himself wickedly in the secrecy of his study.

In Paulus *Æmilius*' *Life of Saint Louis* we read of a certain Margaret Countess of Flanders, sister of that Jane who succeeded her father Baldwin I, Emperor of the Greeks; being admissible as a childless woman, according to the History. This Margaret in her early youth was given a tutor called William, a man much revered for his holy life, who had already taken minor orders; but this did not prevent him from giving two children to his pupil. They received the names of John and Baldwin, and the secret was so well kept that few ever heard of it; afterwards however they were legitimised by the Pope. But what lessons to give, what a trainer of youth! Well, such is History!

I knew a great lady at Court, who was reputed to have had improper intercourse with her professor of literature. One day Chicot,⁶ the King's jester, taunted her with it before His Majesty & a large company, saying it was a wonder she had not been ashamed to have intercourse—only he used a coarser word—with such an ugly low-bred fellow as that, instead

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of choosing a handsome lover like a woman of spirit. The bystanders roared with laughter, & the poor lady was in tears; for she believed that the jester had been put up to it by the King, who was given to making such back-handed strokes. I have known other great ladies & Princesses who would spend day after day dallying with secretaries in their closets, under pretext of dictating letters; and when they had no letters for them to write, would make out that they had something they needed read to them, because reading for themselves was a strain on their eyes.

There is no excuse for ladies at Court who choose men of this class, they deserve the worst that is said of them; for they are in no wise hampered in their choice, but have both freedom and opportunity to be fastidious. It is different with unfortunate girls who are subject to tyrannical parents, and are watched continually by tutors and governesses, of whom they go in terror; they are obliged to pick up whatever pebbles they can find to brighten their garden; they must gobble whatever dish comes their way, whether it is roast or boiled, hot or cold. Accordingly they avail themselves, as opportunity offers, of a lackey or tutor; it may be one of those quack professors of literature or painting, of dancing or of the lute or violin. Generally it is some teacher of the arts or sciences, not excluding monks and other religious men; there are plenty of instances in Boccaccio's tales and in the Novels of the Queen of Navarre. But I have known cases too of pages and lackeys serving the purpose; also comedians, of which there was a case at Court, two maids of honour taking two of them as lovers. Poets too are often chosen, I know several who have had successes alike with maids, wives and widows; for women love their offerings of praise, & by this bait are often caught. Your scheming lawyer is of course very dangerous too. But let a man only go a-fishing for women, and the fish will help him; for women want nothing better than to be caught.

See now why Boccaccio, and others with him, declare maids to be the most constant in love, much more so than wives and widows. The sex may be compared to people on a sinking ship; those who cannot swim

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cling to the first spar they can lay their hands on, refusing to leave it until help comes; but experienced swimmers throw themselves into the sea & strike out boldly for the shore. In the same way the maid, as soon as she has attracted her first lover, clings to him with a passionate constancy; for guarded and governed as she is, she never wants to be quit of him for fear she might not have a chance to get another. But wives and widows, who know the breast-stroke & the leg-stroke well, & have opportunities to swim at large in the waters of love, turn readily from one lover to another; for if they weary of one or he of them, there are always two waiting for the vacancy, so that to wife or widow the loss of one lover is the gain of two.

Again, a maid has not the means, neither house of her own nor money, to attract new lovers every day; the most she can give them is some such token as a lock of hair, a bracelet or ring of little pearly beads, a pretty scarf, or some other pathetic gift of little value. For though she be a daughter of the greatest house in the land, and heiress of great wealth, she will be given such a small allowance by parents or guardians (at least I have generally seen it to be so) that she has nothing to spend on lovers; and has but one purse which she can generously open to them. But maids are miserly about giving themselves, whether or no they are kept good only by the fact that for lack of wealth they have never acquired the habit of giving. Clearly generosity can only begin with possession, & it must be admitted that women can be very open-handed, when as wives or widows they have the wherewithal; especially it is so when they have set their minds on a man, for a fancy grows to be a passion, & then they will strip themselves (in both senses) to their very chemise in order to obtain their desire. It is the same with gluttons, who are equally slaves of their mouths; when they have set their mind on some dainty they must taste it, be the cost what it may. In such caprices poor maids cannot indulge, who must be content to take what comes their way, whether it be good or bad.

I could give countless instances of their loves, shewing their various desires and odd practices, but I should never be finished. In any case these

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stories would have little point unless the name of the lady were given in full, and that I would not do for the world; for it would bring scandal on them, & I have sworn to avoid all scandal in this book, so that no one may be able to reproach me with malice. There is no harm in telling stories where the name is suppressed; in doing this I leave it to the world to guess who were the persons, and often I daresay they will give a name to one which belongs to another.

¶ The differences in the natures of women, according as they are maid, wife or widow, may be compared to those in timber according to the tree it is cut from. We see how logs of certain trees, as for example the ash and the beech, will blaze in a fire even though they are quite green; while logs of others, as the elm and the alder, may be ever so dry and well seasoned, yet they will do no more than smoulder slowly. And there is a third class of trees whose timber when old & dry is so excessively inflammable that it seems not so much to burn as to be instantaneously converted into ashes. Now maids are like the ash-tree and the beech, in as much as they burn brightly & readily, while still in their green years; indeed it would sometimes seem that in their mother's belly they acquired amorous heat and a disposition to harlotry. The fair *Lais* might well have borrowed that disposition from her mother *Tymandra*, who was such a famous harlot; & one could think of dozens of others who were born with that character so perfected by the good punks their mothers that they did not wait for the age of puberty, generally about twelve or thirteen, but even earlier made the experiment of love.

¶ Why, not twelve years ago there was a daughter of a pastry-cook in *Paris*, who at the age of nine was found to be with child! At first it was not known what she was suffering from, & her father took a phial of her water to a physician, who said at once that her only illness was pregnancy. 'What!' cried the father, 'my daughter, Sir, is only nine years old!' The physician was astonished, but held to his opinion; 'That is as may be,' said he, 'the fact remains that she is pregnant.' Examining the child then, he found her indeed to be in that condition. She confessed with whom she

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had had doings, & her seducer was executed according to law, for having outraged her tender age and given her a child while yet a child herself. I much regret that I had to include this example here, for it is one of a private person of no rank; whereas I had decided not to sully my pages with doings of the vulgar, but only to exhibit the great and exalted.

For this departure from my plan I must ask to be excused, inasmuch as the story is very unusual, nor do I know of any such miracle happening to a lady of rank, at least there is none on record; though at the early age of nine they have easily endured to be bedded with a man, both in marriage & in fornication. I could give several instances of women deflowered thus in childhood, without their having died of it, or suffered anything worse than fainting with the pain—if it was not with the pleasure!

¶ This reminds me of a story of a gallant lord, a brave man if ever there was one; who was complaining one day of the large calibre of the girls and women with whom it was his fate to consort. He said that in the end he would have to look for mere infants, girls just out of the cradle, not to have the sensation of wandering in so wide a sea; he hoped with these to feel the pleasure of swimming in a narrow strait. If he had addressed these words to a great lady I know, she might have answered him as she did another gentleman who made the same complaint, to whom she said: ‘I don’t know who has the better right to complain, you men of our spaciousness or we of your minute objects, your teeny-weeny little miseries! Indeed I think there is as much to complain of in you as in us, in that you do not bring a cartridge equal to the bore of the gun.

¶ Surely that was reasonable talk! It reminds me of a great lady at Court, who was one day standing and contemplating the great bronze Hercules, which is set up in the fountain at *Fontainebleau*; she had given her arm to an honourable gentleman for the walk, and to him she remarked that this Hercules, though a most admirable work, was not so well proportioned in all his members as he ought to be; for the midmost was too small in proportion to the rest, not corresponding at all to his gigantic body. The gentleman replied that all he could say about that was that evidently in

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those days the ladies were not so large where that member would have to go as now they were. While on this subject I must mention a Princess, who got to know that her name had been given to a certain great gun, and one day she asked the reason. There was a gentleman bold enough to answer, 'Because, Madam, it is of larger bore than any other we have.'

Yet women have found pretty good remedies, and are always on the look out for others, to make their doorways narrower and the entrance more of a squeeze. Not all think it worth while to use them, for when the way is much trodden, when there is much coming and going of visitors, as well as the wear and tear of children passing through, the entrance is necessarily stretched and kept wide. But in pursuing this theme I have got a little off the track; I must return now, and hope there is no harm done, as the subject was not unconnected with that of my discourse.

¶ There are plenty of other girls, who let pass the green & tender years, waiting for a full maturity, the seasoning of their timber as it were; it may be because they are of a cold nature in that early period, as is only to be expected, or else because they are kept so close, as with some is very necessary. For as the Spanish proverb has it, '*Uvas e nmas son muy malas a guardar*, vines and virgins are difficult to guard;' meaning that some passer-by or visitor to the country may wish to taste, and either is an easy prey when the bloom begins to come on the fruit—though in the one case it is more like the down on a young chicken. At the same time there are some maids so unemotional they may be compared to vines on which all the north-winds of winter might beat without ever shaking them or harming them; while others are kept innocent by their very stupidity & ignorance of the world, I mean the kind who could not endure to hear the name of love mentioned. I once heard it said of such a woman, one who practised every austerity and believed in reform, that she fainted on the spot when she heard a woman spoken of as a harlot. When the story was told to a certain great lord, his wife who was present remarked, 'That lady had better not come here, for if she faints at the mention of harlots, she would die at the sight we should give her of them.'

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Still there are maids, who as soon as they become aware of their hearts, are so easily tamed that they will come at once and eat out of one's hand; they are not like the pious and conscientious sort, who hold in such awe the commandments of the Lord their God, that forget altogether the commandment of Love. But take care, many of these devout patterers of paternosters, with their daily prowling in churches and slobbering of images, hide under this hypocrisy such lusts as indeed need to be hidden; that is why they seek the reputation of excessive prudes, would be taken if they could for such a saint as Catherine of Sienna. And how often have they succeeded in deceiving the world! I am reminded of a great Princess now dead, indeed she was no less than a Queen, who when she desired a man & wished to bring him to her purpose, which was very often, would begin her attack with a discourse on the love we owe to God; from this she would skilfully work round to worldly love, till it was plain what she wanted of her companion; and so the pious discourse ended in love's sacrament, the quintessential act. That shews how we are deceived by our saints, or rather our hypocrites; I give this example for the benefit of the innocent, who are little acquainted with the world they live in.

¶ Now I will tell a story, of which I cannot vouch for the truth. Of late years there was a general procession through a certain great city, when a woman was encountered, of what rank matters not, bare-footed & with all the signs of penitence, indeed doing the miserable sinner enough for ten. Having given this display, she went and dined with her lover on a shoulder of kid and a ham; and it was Lent at the time! The savoury odour being noticed in the street, the house was entered and our penitent discovered at her feast. She was arrested and condemned to walk through the town with her shoulder of kid on a spit over her shoulder, and the ham hanging round her neck; and was it not good justice to punish her in this way!

¶ Other ladies there are so proud and haughty that to see the way they repulse men who make proposals of love, fairly chasing them away, you would say that they disdain both Earth and Heaven. Give them time! all

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that is needed is patience and perseverance, and you will find them at your feet. For it is in the nature of pride, after it has soared enough to please itself, to climb down and reduce its price. And so these vain-glorious ladies, as I have observed in many cases, after disdaining love and those who spoke of it, take their place in the ranks and carry out Love's commands, even to the extent of marrying men of low condition, in no respect their match. Thus Love makes them his plaything as a punishment for their overweening; liking best to shew his power in such cases because victory is the more glorious when it brings down glory.

¶ I knew in former times a girl at Court so lofty & disdainful that when some gallant made advances to her, no matter how well qualified he might be, she would answer him so proudly and with such contempt for his love that he returned to the subject no more; indeed there was none like her to express contempt, for she had a fine command of words. And with face and gesture she could be equally expressive; so that it was a terror to see her turn on a man, who should have ventured some sweet proposal. But Love at last caught her napping, and well she was punished; for she surrendered to a gallant who got her with child three weeks before she was to be married; and he was a man not to be compared with many of the honourable gentlemen who had aspired to be her lovers! In this we can only say with Horace, '*Sic placet Veneri*, so it pleased Venus;' for such occurrences can no more be explained than miracles, which they truly are.

¶ It was my fancy once at Court to become the lover of a fair and honest young lady of very good family, who was extremely intelligent, but at the same time proud and high-handed in her ways. I loved her dearly, & determined when courting her to answer back just as arrogantly as she should speak to me; for as the proverb says, meet bravery with a bravery and a half. But she was not at all offended, for if I treated her so sometimes, at others I praised her highly; and nothing so softens a woman's heart as praise of her beauty & her character. I even praised her pride, saying that it became her well, for it came from a desire not to make herself

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common. Indeed it is my opinion that any lady who allows familiarities to everyone instead of maintaining a certain haughtiness of demeanour, if only for her reputation's sake, is unworthy to be loved; so I honoured my sweetheart the more on this account, and my pet-name for her was always Vainglory. And she took such pleasure in it that she must needs call me in return her Arrogant.

We continued always on such good terms, and I was long her lover. If it is not boasting to say so, I had as large a share in her good graces or a larger than had a great lord of the Court who made love to her; but at last she was carried off and married by a great favourite of the King, a valiant gentleman certainly, who yet would hardly have won her from me without the King's support. None the less we kept up the connexion so long as she lived; and I never ceased to hold her in honour. Perhaps I shall be blamed for telling this story, for people are always ready to say that stories about one's self are out of place; well, I plead guilty, but should like to mention that in this book there are plenty of stories about myself in all circumstances, which offend no one merely because I appear incognito. ¶ There are still other girls of such high spirits, crazy things so intoxicated with fun that their thoughts are always taken up with some joke or other; they pass their whole time in laughter open or suppressed, & have not a moment to think of anything but their own schemes for amusement. I have known many such, who would far rather be dancing to a fiddle, or running & jumping about a park, than listening to any addresses of a lover; especially they adore the chase, so that they should rather be called sisters of Diana than of Venus. I knew a valiant lord, since dead, who fell passionately in love with such a girl, and loved her still when she was a great lady, till at one time he seemed likely to die of despair. 'When I wish to lay my heart at her feet,' he said, 'she talks to me of nothing but her dogs and hunting! If only I could become one of her harriers, by migration of my soul into its body according to the doctrine of Pythagoras, she might pay heed to my love and I be healed of my wound.' But he recovered himself, for he left her after a while. Pah! he was no such good

hunter as she, to cry off a scent once he had laid on; he should have pressed her always, following wherever the wild mood took her, nor caring how often he might be the victim of her jokes.

For it is to be noted that when girls of this sort are fully fledged, as we say of chickens, they want to try that greater game, which they have left to the last. And in this they resemble wolves, which as cubs are such pretty gentle little things, playing about in their downy coats, but when they are grown up change into vicious beasts of prey. So your merry young lady, when she has done with the chase and the ball-room, and has played her last practical joke, my faith! then she becomes a very wolf in the pastures of Venus, preying on the mildly piping shepherds themselves. To sum it all up, there never was maid, wife or widow, but early or late she burned with desire; even as the timber of every tree burns, save only the larch, to which there is no woman corresponding.

Talking of the larch and its peculiar resistance to fire, which is such that you can get neither flame nor charcoal from it, Julius Cæsar had experience of this. He was returning from Gaul, and had sent word to the Piedmontese to meet him with provisions, which were to be stored in sheds on his line of march. They all obeyed, except the men of a castle called Larignum, who were a gang of robbers recognizing no authority. Cæsar decided that they must be suppressed, and set off to lay siege to their strong-hold. As he drew near he saw that it was only fortified with timber, at which he burst out laughing, saying that he would soon have these bold rebels. He ordered straw and faggots to be brought up, to set fire to the palisade; and when he and his men saw the flames leap up all its height, they expected soon to see it reduced to ashes. But when the faggots were burnt there were no more flames, and they were amazed to see the palisade not only standing, but in the same condition as at first, without sign of burning on it. So Cæsar had to think of other means and he ordered his sappers to dig under it; this induced the defenders to ask a parley, which ended in their surrender. Of them Cæsar learned the peculiar virtue of the larch, or *larix* as it is in Latin; from which this castle

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took its name of Larignum, being entirely fortified with timber of that tree. There are many parents who would like their daughters to have the same nature, and to burn without the fire producing any change in their conduct; aye, and there are many husbands who would like their wives to be as the larch. Much anxiety would thus be saved to parents and husbands, who would not so often be sent off with a flea in their ear; nor would there be so many whores and cuckolds on show in the world. But happily there is no likelihood of such a change, for the world would soon be depopulated, and the few who were born would live like marble statues, without pleasure in themselves or in one another; so at least said a gentleman and lady I know of, and for my part I heartily agree with them, holding that nature is miraculously perfect and any change in her order would be for the worse; we have only to follow her as our good captain, and we cannot fail to be on the right road.

HAVING SAID ENOUGH ON THE SUBJECT OF MAIDS, it is time now to make our bow to the widows, and to consider their case in its turn. To love a widow is easy and profitable, for they are the freest of women, being subject neither to parents nor to husbands, and what is more, not to any law. A man may make love to a widow & lie with her as often as he pleases, and he incurs no penalty, as he might in the case of a maid or a wife. So it was enacted by the Romans, from whom we derive most of our laws; with them no one could be punished for this, either in his person or in his property, as I learn from a great legal authority, who quoted Papinian to me on the point. That great authority of antiquity, treating of adulteries, wrote to this effect; that if sometimes the misconduct of maid or widow had been loosely included under the head of adultery, it was a misuse of terms; and again in another passage, that the successor to an estate has no right of censure over the morals of his predecessor's widow, save in a case where her husband in his life-time had begun an action against her for misconduct, which action the successor may pursue as the plaintiff's executor, and in this character only. Nowhere in Roman law is any penalty imposed on the widow, unless it be for re-marrying within the year of her mourning, or what amounts to the same, for bearing an illegitimate child in the second period of eleven months; for such child is too late to be attributed to the deceased husband & too early not to have been possibly conceived in the year of mourning, consecrated to the honour of the first bed. It was a law of Heliogabalus which forbade a widow to re-marry within a year of her husband's death, the idea being that she should have time to weep for him, and that his death should not set her instantly free to take another. That was a proper safeguard to husbands. As to her jointure, the successor could never deprive her of it, whatever follies she might commit with her body; & for this a good reason was given by the lawyer my informant, to wit, that as the successor had such interest in the widow's forfeiting her charge on the estate, it would lead to calumny if the door were once opened to him to bring accusations against her; and no widow could afford, however

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good her jointure, to defend herself against a campaign of calumny, paid for out of the bulk of the estate.

¶ Under such laws, it seems to me, Roman ladies must have had good times, being so free as they were to amuse themselves. It is no wonder that a certain widow in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, as we read in the life of that Emperor, was looking ahead even when she followed her husband's body to the grave; the story is that amid her sobbing and sighing, her weeping and wailing, she pressed so tightly the hand of the friend who supported her as to give a certain intimation of her love for him and willingness to marry. It could not be before the end of the year except by special dispensation, as was granted to Pompey for his marriage with Cæsar's daughter, but was only granted to such great persons as these; so they waited, & were married when her term of mourning ended; though in the meanwhile her gallant plucked many a good sprig from the tree, or if you prefer it, snatched many a loaf out of the oven. This lady certainly meant to lose no time so early did she make provision for her desires; nor did she lose on that account one penny of the solid wealth that was her dowry.

¶ How happy were the Roman widows! and one might add, how happy are those of France, who lose none of their rights for giving joy to heart and body! It is true that cases have from time to time been debated in Parliament; for example, there was a rich lord who persistently claimed the forfeiture of his sister-in-law's jointure, on the ground that she was leading an immoral life. But though he charged her in addition with a graver offence, she gained her case, and the brother-in-law had to allow her the full jointure bequeathed to her, which was a very handsome one. Only she was deprived of the custody of her son and daughter, the High Court of Parliament holding that widows who re-marry forego that right. Nevertheless it is not long since I heard of more than one widow who when they re-married succeeded in keeping daughters still in their minority, in the face of claims to their custody put in by brothers-in-law & other relations; but they were ladies of high rank, & owed it mainly to

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the influence of the Prince whose favourites they were. Aha! a fair lady carries always a privy seal more powerful than that of any law-giver! But of legal discourse I must now make an end, for it is not my profession, and though I might be very pleased with what I was saying, all the time it might be worthless! So I yield place to our great lawyeis.

¶ Of our widows there are few but are ready to cross the ford again; they re-marry as cheerfully as sailors return to sea, who may have been shipwrecked three or four times. In the same way wives, who in the pains of child-bed swear never to incur them again, and protest that never henceforth will men be anything to them, yet are hardly past the period of purification when they are dancing to the same tune as before. A Spanish lady once in child-bed had a candle lit in honour of Our Lady of Mont-Sai-rat, who gives special succour to women in labour; but though her pains were severe, and though as usual she swore never to incur them again, she was no sooner delivered than she said to the nurse holding the candle, '*Ser a esto cabillo de candela para otra vez*, put away that piece of candle for another time.'

¶ Still there are some widows who do not wish to re-marry, even of those who are widowed in the flower of their beauty; and many such have persisted in their resolve, as well in our own times as in the past. We know how the Queen-mother, who was widowed at the early age of thirty-seven, continued in that state ever after; nor did she so much as give a thought to re-marriage, though she was beautiful and charming enough to attract any man. I may be asked where was the man who could be called a fit match for her, or was comparable to the great King Henry. Besides, I shall be told, in marrying she must have lost her crown and Kingdom, which were worth more than a hundred husbands, so sweet is power and so to be desired. All this I acknowledge, but ask in return, what is there that Love cannot make us forgetful of; Love can only have been kept out of her heart by another love already in possession, therefore she is greatly to be praised for her constancy to the King's memory; indeed she deserves a glorious immortality.

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¶ How easily she might have done as another Queen in white,⁹ who for lack of continence married the steward of her household, the Lord of Rabaudange! The King at first took it very badly, but as she was his mother he excused for her sake the said Rabaudange; it was arranged that by day before the world he should serve her still as steward, not to deprive the Queen of her proper dignity, but by night she should make of him what she would, either servant or master, that being left to them to settle between themselves. But of course the husband ruled her, for however great a lady may be, when it comes to this relationship the male has the upper position, for humanity is then subject to the law of nature. I had this tale from the great Cardinal of Lorraine, predecessor of the present Cardinal; he told it at *Poissy* to King Francis II, when he created the eighteen knights of the order of Saint Michael; an unprecedented number, by the way. Among others was the Lord of Rabaudange, then a very old man, who had not been seen at Court for a long time, but only on some of our military expeditions; for he had retired from society on the death of M. de Lautrec, of whose escort to *Naples* he had been captain. M. de Lautrec met his death there, and the grief of the other at the loss of so good a master was very great; indeed such a loss is often the most sincerely lamented. The Cardinal on that occasion stated his belief that M. de Rabaudange was originally sprung from a marriage somewhat like his own to the Queen-mother; for the lady was a widow of high-rank who married her page, raising him from that condition for the purpose, because she could not continue longer in single virtue.

¶ Enough of such flighty widows, let us pass on to those of a more grave & honourable disposition. For example there was our Queen Elizabeth, known as Donna Isabel of Austria¹⁰ before she married King Charles IX; all will agree that she was one of the kindest and sweetest, as well as one of the most wise and virtuous Queens that have sat on our throne since it was a throne; and it is no slight on other Queens to say so. Of all her beauties the most wonderful was her colour, and the clear delicacy of her skin; no lady at Court had a complexion near so fine. But though she was

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not above middle height, her figure was perfect in its lines. With such temptation to pride she remained virtuous and kindly, never hurting the feelings of anyone, not by the least word; she spoke but little indeed and always with a sweet dignity, using only her native Spanish.

She was pious without being at all bigoted, nor ever made display of her devotion by public acts, as I have seen some of our paternostrians do; for she was so earnest in her prayers at the regular hours, that she had no arrears of devotion to make up at other times. Or if an excess of zeal possessed her, it was in her bed with drawn curtains that she would pray, as I have heard some of her ladies relate; there in secret she would kneel in her night-gown, for half an hour or an hour, beating her breast & even tearing it in passionate devotion. She is not likely to have indulged in these practises while King Charles her husband was alive, and afterwards they might never have been known but for one of her women, who always remained to sleep in the room when the others retired after putting their mistress to bed. This woman, hearing sighs from the Queen's bed one night, determined to peep between the curtains, & saw her in an attitude of devotion, praying and calling on God with silent but expressive lips. As this was repeated every night the woman presumed on the familiarity allowed her to warn her mistress that sooner or later her health must suffer; at which the Queen was very angry, not so much at the warning given her, as at the discovery of her devotion. She would have denied it if she could, & gave the woman strict orders not to breathe a word of it; then she lay down as if to sleep, but later she was at her prayers again, making amends for the interruption. She knew the woman would not dare to peep again, but her little wax-lamp threw a shadow on the bed-curtain; for she had hung it within from the corner-post, to be able to read her Book of Hours throughout the night instead of keeping it as other Princesses on the table beside the bed. Ah! such prayers are no way related to those of hypocrites, who perform their devotions in public to impress the world with their piety, mouthing and mumbling their prayers for all to hear.

Our Queen was praying for the soul of her royal husband, whom she

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never ceased to regret; yet she was never heard lifting up her voice in a wail, she indulged in none of the frantic behaviour of those women, who to create an effect tear their cheeks & pull out their hair in handfuls; no, her mourning was of the unobstrusive kind, her precious tears seeming to steal down her face in spite of her, and her sighs coming as soft and low as if she had almost been ashamed of her grief. But though she restrained it so, & none could say she ever sought credit by a sign, all were convinced, perhaps for that very reason, that in her heart was a great anguish. Even so a torrent, when it is checked, is more violent than when it has a free course.

I remember how throughout the illness of her royal husband, whenever she came to visit him, she would sit down quickly a little away from the bed-side, not up against the pillow as is usual; nor would she speak but a few words to him while she was there; but all the time she gazed at him with such passionate eyes, one could imagine that she was nursing him in her heart, having wrapped him round with the love she bore him. Then you might see a gentle tear steal down her cheek, but you would have to watch her closely, for often when she pretended to be blowing her nose she wiped away the tear from her eye; ah! there is none but would have been touched to see her as I did then, so anxious to conceal her heart's grief, lest a sight of it should grieve her King. Her concern for him would then lead her, after she had left his room, to go and pray God for his recovery; ah! truly did she love and honour her royal husband, even though she knew of his loves and his mistresses; in which perhaps she judged that he did not so much please himself as take what was due to his high estate. However that may be, she was no less genial to him on their account, never gave him a bitter word but patiently endured the wrong he did her, keeping her little ache of jealousy to herself. A worthy mate she was for such a King, for as fire and water they were opposites of equal dignity; he being lively and brilliant, and she cool and of an even disposition.

I have been told on good authority, that in the early days of her widow-

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hood, when the ladies her intimates were offering their consolations, there was one of little tact, as in any company there always is, who thought to gratify her bereaved mistress by saying, 'If only he had left you with a son, Madam, instead of a daughter, you would now be Queen-mother, & your power daily growing & establishing itself.'—'Ah!' she answered, 'do not vex me with such talk! As if France had not enough troubles, without my producing another to complete her ruin! If I had a son, so many would claim the administration of the Kingdom during his infancy that civil war and sedition would be the result; in which everyone would be seeking his own advantage at the expense of a helpless child. Was it not so in the minority of the King my husband, who was only saved by the Queen his mother and a faithful few? How then would it relieve my sorrow now, to have the responsibility of having borne a son, and to hear ringing in my ears the curses of the people, whose voice is that of God? No, I praise Heaven for the fruit my body yielded, and whether good or evil come of it for me, shall bow to God's will.'

How loyal was this Queen, not only to her husband, but also to the country he had brought her to! They say that on the night of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, not having heard the least rumour of what was intended, she went quietly to bed as usual; and when she was informed on waking in the morning, what a terrible drama had been enacted, 'The King!' she cried, 'does he know of it? alas! what will he say?'—'Yes, Madam,' she was told, 'it was done by his orders.'—'My God! what do you tell me?' she cried then, 'Who were the counsellors that prompted him to this? I implore and beseech of thee, O God, to grant him Thy pardon; shew now Thy great mercy to my King, and judge him not according to this act.' Then suddenly she asked for her Book of Hours, and with streaming eyes she remained long in prayer.

Only think what it meant to set her face against that festival of blood, when she had every reason to desire the extermination of the Protestants with the Admiral their leader, who were sworn enemies of her own faith, which she loved & honoured above all things in the world; think of this,

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I say, and realize the goodness of this Queen. These people whom she pitied had also stirred up sedition against the King her husband, as indeed she had been warned to expect by her father the Emperor, who said to her when she took leave of him to come into France: 'My daughter, you are going to be Queen in the most beautiful & most powerful Kingdom in the world, on which account I consider you very fortunate; but you will be more fortunate than I think if you find the Kingdom whole and sound, as it was in more flourishing days. No, I fear you will find it dismembered and scattered; for if the King holds a good part of it, the great Protestant Lords have usurped the rest.' And as her father told her, so she found it.

When she was a widow, many gentlemen & ladies at Court, & these some of the most clear-sighted, expected that the new King on his return from Poland would marry her, even though she was his sister-in-law; for that obstacle could be overcome by a dispensation from the Pope, who has great power in such matters, and is ready to exercise it in the case of great persons for sake of the public good. There were many reasons why this marriage should take place, which I must leave to learned historians to set out in full; I will only mention this one, that the marriage would have been a recognition of the King's obligations to the Emperor, for assisting his return from Poland. There is no doubt that if the Emperor had chosen to put the least obstacle in his way, our King would never have been able to leave Poland, much less to arrive safely in France. The Poles would have kept him in their country, had he not slipped out when he did, without bidding them goodbye; and it was impossible then for him to pass through Germany, where all the roads were being watched in the hope of capturing him, as the gallant King Richard of England was captured on his return from the Holy Land, a story we have all read in our chronicles. They would have held him to ransom, or possibly done worse; for the Germans never forgave him for the doings of Saint Bartholomew's Eve, at least the Protestant Princes did not. So having to act quickly, our King went and threw himself on the good faith of the

Emperor; who fortunately received him with honour, shewing himself as friendly as if they had been brothers. After entertaining him for several days, the Emperor himself escorted him a day's journey and more, then gave him God-speed and a safe-conduct through his realm; by means of which he gained Carinthia, Venetia and finally his own Kingdom.

So he was under no small obligation to the Emperor; which many persons expected him to discharge, as I have said, by cementing the alliance with this marriage. But long before when he was on his way to Poland, he had seen a lady at *Blamont* in Lorraine, namely Mademoiselle de Vaudemont, otherwise Louise of Lorraine, who was one of the most beautiful and accomplished Princesses in Christendom, as well as one of the most virtuous; & in her his eyes took such joy, that presently he embraced her. Having nursed his love throughout all his stay abroad, on his return he dispatched into Lorraine M. du Gua, "a great favourite of his as he well deserved to be; who had instructions to obtain for him the lady in marriage. You can imagine there was little difficulty or disputing over this, since it was far beyond the hopes of the lady or her father, that he should be father-in-law of the King of France, and that she should be Queen. Of her I shall have more to say in another place; I have already spoken of her constancy in widowhood, and how the memory of her husband held her heart as a fortress against all desire, though she was but thirty-seven when she lost him.

To return to our little Queen Elizabeth, she grew impatient of staying in France for many reasons, but chiefly because she was not given the honour that was her due; so she decided to go and finish out her gentle life at *Vienna*, with the Emperor and Empress her parents. When she had been there awhile, the King of Spain lost his wife, Anne of Austria; and wishing to marry her sister, who was no other than our Queen Elizabeth, he sent to his own sister the Empress, begging her to make the proposal on his behalf. But the Queen would not consider it though her mother pressed his suit as many as three times; always the Queen pleaded her respect for the ashes of her husband, which she would on no account

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insult by re-marrying; and she added as a further reason against it, the near kinship of herself & the King of Spain, which might draw on them the anger of God. At last the Empress & her brother decided to employ a Jesuit of great learning & eloquence, to remove her scruples if he could by preaching and argument; especially he was to quote all the passages of Holy Scripture which might further his design. But the attack was no sooner opened than the Queen met it with quotations equally pertinent; for since her bereavement she had made a deep study of the Word of God, and in pious humility had founded on this her resolution never to slight her husband's memory by second marriage. The result was that Master Jesuit returned without anything achieved; but being met by urgent letters from the King of Spain, he had to renew the attempt, in spite of the resolute answer given him by the Queen. This time she had not the patience to dispute with him, but told him sharp & short, that if he bothered her any more he would be sorry for it, for she would have him whipped in her kitchen. I have heard tell, though I cannot say if it is true, that he did actually return a third time, & that the Queen carried out her threat and had him whipped unmercifully; no, I can hardly believe that, she had too much love for men of religion.

In constancy unmovable this virtuous Queen continued to the end of her days, nor ever ceased to honour with tears the venerable bones of the King her husband; till it seemed that by weeping she drained away the very fountain of her life, for she died at the early age of thirty-five." And thus was lost such a mirror of virtue to all ladies, as Christendom could ill spare.

But great as was the love she shewed for the King her husband, by her virtuous continence and prolonged mourning she did even more for love of her sister-in-law the Queen of Navarre. For on learning that she was reduced to extreme poverty in a castle of *Auvergne*,¹ deserted by most of her kinsfolk & those she had benefitted, Queen Elizabeth sent to greet her & make her an offer of assistance; & when it was accepted, what she gave was no less than the half of the revenues which were her jointure in

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France. In fact she shared everything with her sister-in-law as if she had been her own sister; and but for this liberality of hers, it is said that the Queen of Navarre would have suffered terribly. Ever after her love and gratitude to Queen Elizabeth were boundless, and her grief at her death was such that hardly she could bear it with becoming restraint; for three weeks she kept her bed, mourning her with tears and groans continually. To the end of her life she never spoke of her without regret, and used to call up her memory in such beautiful words as would surely give her immortality were they recorded, even though she had never been a Queen and won the praise of historians. Before Queen Elizabeth died, I have heard that she composed a book of devotions, which might almost be compared to the Word of God; and in addition a history of all that happened in France while she was there. I cannot say this from my own knowledge, but was assured of it by one who professed to have seen the very book in the hands of the Queen of Navarre, as if it had been sent by her sister-in-law before her death; he said that she counted it her greatest treasure, not only as a love-token and memento, but also for the beauty of its contents. Ah! how one sees that gift from one true heart to another, sent in the hour of death to be a solace of the mourner! this can be no fiction, a vision so radiant convinces as an oracle of God, which we cannot but believe.

Well, that is the sum of what I have to say about our good Queen Elizabeth, and her loyalty to the memory of her husband. It was her very nature to be virtuous, as all who knew her recognized; I have been told by M. de Lansac, "who was in Spain when she died, that her mother the Empress exclaimed, '*El mejor de nosotros es muerto*, the best of us all is dead.' In her constancy the Queen seems to have followed a tradition of her family, but to have taken her mother especially as model, for the Empress also was young and beautiful when widowed, and never would re-marry; she left the imperial capital of Austria and Germany soon after the death of the Emperor her husband, and for the rest of her life continued in devoted chastity. At the invitation of her brother she joined him in Spain,

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and gave him the help he asked for in the administration of his Kingdom; nor could he have had a better counsellor, for the mother of our pious Queen had a very good head for affairs. I heard it said by King Henry III, who was as good a judge of character as any man in his Kingdom, that in his opinion she was the most intelligent Princess in the world.

When she was on her way to Spain, after crossing the two Germanies she came to *Genoa* in Italy, where she embarked; but off *Marseilles* the ship was caught in a storm & was obliged to seek shelter in the roadstead. Though it was the month of December and a hard winter the Queen insisted that her galley, with the others escorting her, should remain at anchor outside the harbour, rather than give possible offence by going in; she herself, though she was put ashore every day, only once went into the town to see the streets. It was a good week before the weather came down so that they could put to sea again; and it was her pious practice every morning, after sleeping aboard, to be landed near the church of Saint Victor outside the town, where she heard Mass with great devotion. Afterwards dinner would be served for her in the Abbey, at which she had the company of a few of her ladies and her officers, and usually some of the gentlemen of *Marseilles* as well; who paid her all the honour due to so great a Princess, aye and more, for the King of France had desired them to receive her as it were his royal self, in return for the good welcome and entertainment she had given him at *Vienna*. Perceiving this she felt much at ease, and spoke with them in a free and friendly way, more in the French or German fashion than the Spanish; so that they were as pleased with her as she with them.

Afterwards she wrote to the King to thank him, & said she had never met anywhere such courtly gentlemen as in his town of *Marseilles*; some twenty of them she mentioned by name, among whom was M. Castellan, called the Lord Altyvity, a captain of galleys. He acquired a certain fame by marrying the fair Chateauneuf, as she was called at Court; but later lost his life in adding to his fame, for if he killed the Grand Prior he fell with him, as I hope to relate in another place. It was from his wife I heard

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the details of this visit to *Marseilles*; she was full of praise for the Queen, and told me how she enjoyed her stay at *Marseilles*, and how she admired everything in her walks. But every evening she must needs go aboard her galley, in case the storm should abate or it should blow from a favourable quarter, for she wished to continue her journey the moment it should be possible; or it may be that she had fears of giving offence by prolonging her stay. I was at Court when the King was given news of her call at the port, and he was greatly concerned about her reception, which he wished to be more than worthy of her. The Empress is still living, & her virtue shining as brightly. After being of the greatest help to her brother, so I am told, she has retired into a convent of nuns, to end her days in peaceful seclusion; they are an order founded by her sister the Princess Royal of Spain, and are called *Descalados*, Unshod, because they wear neither shoes nor stockings.

This Spanish Princess was very beautiful, and had a majestic presence; but that goes without saying, for beauty and majesty seem to be gifts of all royal persons, especially those of Spain. I had the honour not only to see her, but to talk with her in private, when I was in Spain on my way home from Portugal. It happened the first day that I went to pay my respects to Queen Elizabeth of France; she had many questions to ask me about France and Portugal, and while we were talking the Princess was announced. The Queen said to me at once, 'Do not stir, Monsieur de Bourdeille, you will find her a most gracious Princess. She will be pleased to see you and ask you news of the King her son, since you have lately been with him.' Then the Princess came in, and I admired her greatly. She was charmingly dressed, to my mind; on her head was a widow's cap of white crêpe, with a very low peak in the Spanish fashion, coming down to the bridge of her nose; but she wore no other weeds of a Spanish widow, her dress being of silk, as if she had been hardly in mourning. I gazed at her continually from the other end of the room, & was rapt in admiration when the Queen called me up, & told me that the Princess wished to hear news from me of the King her son; for the

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Queen had informed her, as I could hear, that she had been in conversation with one of the French King's gentlemen, just come from Portugal. On this I approached and kissed her robe in the Spanish fashion, and was welcomed with a friendly courtesy; then she began to ask me about her son and all his affairs, seeming anxious to have my opinion; for there was talk then of a marriage between him and Margaret of France, the King's sister, now Queen of Navarre. I gave her plenty of news, for in those days I spoke Spanish as well or better than my own French. Among other things she asked me if her son had grown up handsome, & whom did he resemble; to which I answered that he was one of the handsomest Princes of Christendom, as he certainly was, and that he was the very image of herself, reproducing all her beauty. She blushed a little, but her smile shewed that my words had pleased her.

After I had talked with her some time, the Queen's ladies came in to announce that her supper was served, & so the two sisters separated; but before she went the Queen, who from the window-seat had overheard our conversation, said to me with a laugh, 'You pleased her greatly by what you said of her son's resemblance to her.' Then she asked me what I thought of her; had I not found her a gracious lady; adding, 'I believe she would very gladly marry my brother the King of France, and for my part I should like to see it.' This I was careful to report to the Queen-mother on my return to the French Court, which was then at *Arles* in Provence; but she said that the Princess was old enough to be his mother! I told her further that I had heard in Spain, from a reliable source, that the Princess was resolved, if she could not have the King of France, never to re-marry but to retire from the world. The fact is, the thought of this high match so appealed to her ambition that she indulged in dreams of it till she really believed it to be coming about; at least with half her mind she believed it, while the other half she applied to the building of a monastery, in which she might have an alternative satisfaction. As long as she could entertain a hope of that marriage she refused all others and conducted herself as a model widow; it was only when the King of France

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married her niece that she was disillusioned, and then she expressed herself bitterly, I am told, in some such words as these: '*Aunque la nieta sea por su verano mas moza, y menos cargada de anos que la tia, la hermosura de la tia, ya en su estio, toda hecha y formada por sus gentiles y fructiferos anos, vale mas que todos los frutos que su edad florecida da esperanza a venir; porque la menor desdicha humana los hara caer y perder ni mas ni menos que algunos arboles, los quales en el verano, por sus lindos y blancos flores, nos prometen linda fruta en el estio, y el menor viento que acade los lleva y abate, no quedando que las hojas. Ea! dunque pasase todo con la voluntad de Dios, con el qual desde agora me voy, no con otro, para siempre jamas, me casar.*— Though the niece in the Spring of life is younger, and less charged with years than the aunt, yet the beauty of the aunt, already in its Summer season, all made & formed by the kindly & fruitful years, is worth more than all the fruits to come, of which the other's flowering-time gives only hope; for the least mischance in life will cause them to fall and be lost. Even so some trees in Spring, by their pretty white flowers, give promise of pretty fruits in Summer; and come there but the least wind, these are taken and strewed on the ground, only the leaves remaining. Well! so be it, I resign me to God; to whom alone, from now on for ever, I mean to give myself in marriage.' She was as good as her word; and in her life of pious retirement has left an example to ladies both of high and low estate.

Hearing this, some Christians may exclaim, 'Then it was by God's blessing that she was foiled of marrying King Charles, for she would have exchanged the austerities of widowhood for worldly pleasures.' That may be fairly supposed, but it does not follow that those pleasures were her motive; I should rather say, that what attracted her in the royal marriage was the splendour and dignity of the position, which to the Spanish imagination are representative of the power of God. Being fired by this idea, and seeing her sister an Empress, she aspired to be no less; for the Kingdom of France is in dignity equal to the Empire. Even though her ambition might never be realised, her great heart must needs

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aim at the heights; that is the judgment I have formed from all I have heard of her. In short, she was one of the noblest foreign princesses I have met; though her retirement from the world may be open to the reproach, that there was an element of bitterness in it. Perhaps it was to purge herself of this that she turned to God; certainly her life after gave proof of the purest devotion.

Her mother the Queen of Hungary took the same step, but only in a decrepit old age, and not so much for the sake of her own soul, as to give an example of religion to her brother the Emperor. She was widowed at a very early age, her young husband King Louis losing his life in a battle against the Turks. It was not by his own judgment that he engaged that day, he was persuaded by a headstrong Cardinal, who had great influence over him. The Cardinal told him that he must not distrust the power of God, especially in His own just cause; he might have only, let us say, ten thousand Hungarians, but they were good Christians fighting God's battle, and would rout a hundred thousand Turks. Thus the King was urged to precipitate action, and suffered defeat; and when he was fleeing from the field, he stumbled into a morass in which he sank and was smothered.

As a result of similar advice the last King of Portugal, Sebastian, perished miserably¹⁶ with his little force after hazarding a battle with the Moors when they had treble his numbers. He was persuaded by the sermonising of some Jesuits, who insisted likewise on the power of God, & how by a glance he could confound all the world, though it were banded together against him; which is a profound truth, but one which is abused by men in tempting God, who has secrets which are hidden from us. Some maintain that these Jesuits were honest in their intentions, as may well be believed; others that they had been bribed by the King of Spain to bring about the death of the young King Sebastian, whose fiery courage was a check to those encroachments which since we have seen made by the King of Spain. Here were two disasters, both resulting from the meddling of clerks in war-fare, a trade they have no understanding of.

The great Duke of Guise was of the same opinion after being tricked by false promises in his Italian campaign, and often used to say: 'Much as I love the Church of God, I should never undertake an expedition on the word of a priest.' This was a thrust at Pope Callaffe, known as Paul IV, who failed to keep certain promises made in very solemn words by the Cardinal his spokesman, a brother of the Duke; it appeared afterwards that the Cardinal had only come to *Rome* to sound him, after which he lightly sent his brother on the disastrous enterprize. Probably my Lord of Guise had the Cardinal in mind as well as the Pope, for I have heard that whenever he repeated that saying before the Cardinal, as he was fond of doing, the Cardinal flew into a rage, taking it to be a stone thrown into his garden. Well, if this is not my proper subject, at least it arose out of it. ¶ To return to Queen Mary of Hungary, after the terrible death of her husband she remained a widow, young & beautiful as she was. I know of her beauty both from persons who saw her & from portraits, which represent her without a bad feature or anything one could find fault with; only they give her the Austrian mouth, with the great protruding lip," which truly comes not from the House of Austria but from that of Burgundy. This I learned from a lady at Court in those days, who told me that once when Queen Eleanor was passing through *Dijon*, she went to say her prayers in the Carthusian monastery, where were the venerable tombs of her ancestors the Dukes of Dijon; & being curious to see them she asked to have the tombs opened, as many Kings have had those of their ancestors. Some of those she saw were so well preserved that she could recognise the features, especially the mouth; suddenly she cried, 'Ha! I thought we got our mouths from the House of Austria, but I see we get them from Mary of Burgundy and the Dukes of that line, who must therefore be ancestors of ours. I shall tell my brother the Emperor if I see him soon; else I shall write to him about it.' The lady who told me of it was present, & she said that the Queen spoke with great satisfaction, as well she might; for the House of Burgundy was much nobler than that of Austria, being descended from a son of France, Philip the Bold. From him it inherited

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great estates, as well as noble qualities of mind and heart; I believe there were never four greater Dukes in succession than the last four Dukes of Burgundy.¹⁸ Well, I may be reproached with exaggeration now & then; but as I have no knowledge of the art of writing, it will be easy to forgive me.

Beautiful and charming as Queen Mary was, she was inclined to be a little mannish in her habits; still she was no less attractive to men on that account, but only fitted herself the better for war, which indeed was her chief occupation. Her talents as a leader were recognized by her brother the Emperor, who sent and begged her to join him, that he might give her the command held till then by his aunt, Margaret of Flanders. This she accepted, and introduced a rigorous rule into the Low Countries, in place of the gentle measures taken by the wise Princess her predecessor there. It was out of regard for her that King Francis refused to invade the Low Countries when urged to it by the King of England;¹⁹ for she was a good friend to France and he admired her character, saying also that he was unwilling to add to the troubles of a lady who had been so undeservedly unfortunate in marriage. Her first husband had been King Charles VIII, by whom she was sent back to her parents while still a child; her second had been the son of the King of Aragon, named John, to whom she bore a son after his death, the infant also dying soon after birth. Her third and last was the handsome Duke Philibert of Savoy, by whom she had no issue; & therefore took as her motto, '*Fortune infortune for s une*, From long ill-luck one luck to pluck;' in which she consoled herself perhaps with the possession of a good husband. She is buried with him in the beautiful convent of *Brou*, whose splendid buildings I have seen, near the town of *Bourg*²⁰ in Bresse.

The Queen of Hungary gave good help to the Emperor when he was alone against his enemies. It is true that he had his brother Ferdinand, King of the Romans, but this Prince had enough to do to hold his own against the great Sultan Suliman. The Emperor also had Italy on his hands, which was then all ablaze; in Germany he was threatened by the

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Grand Turk, in Spain there was a rebellion led by M. de Chièvres, and he had difficulties in Hungary and the Low Countries, in the Indies and in Barbary, & the worst of all in France; in short, the whole world seemed to be taking arms against him." This favourite sister of his he made governor-general of the Low Countries, where for near twenty-three years she served him so well that I know not where he had been without her. The government of that quarter of the world he trusted entirely to her, never interfering even when he was in Flanders himself; he would simply look on, while all questions were brought to her for decision. Yet she never took advantage of his trust, but competent as she was, referred all her decisions to him for ratification, and furnished reports to him of all that passed in the Council; so that she was ever his joy and consolation. She conducted some brilliant campaigns, either in person or through her chosen lieutenants; always taking the field on horse-back, like an Amazon Queen.

She it was who first, in her raids into our France, lit those great fires in which so many noble castles were destroyed; among others that of *Fol-lambray*, "a beautiful residence of our Kings, which they had built for hunting and recreation. The King was so vexed at its loss that soon after he took revenge on that most beautiful house of *Bains*, "its beauty put to shame all other buildings, and I have heard from those who saw it in its glory that it might fairly be counted one of the seven wonders of the world, displacing one of those so famous in antiquity. Here Queen Mary received the Emperor Charles & all his Court, when his son King Philip travelled from Spain into Flanders to visit him; and so magnificent was the style of entertainment then, that among the Spaniards *las fiestas de Bains*, the feast of *Bains*, is still spoken of with wonder. I remember on the journey to *Bayonne* some magnificent spectacles being presented, in the way of tournaments & masquerades, which were declared to be poor in comparison by some elderly Spaniards who had seen *las fiestas de Bains*, and judging by a Spanish book that I have seen, which is devoted solely to a description of that feast, I can say the same. Never has anything so

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splendid been seen; it surpassed even the luxury of *Rome*, for the ancient games were included as a small part of the entertainment, all save the mortal combats of gladiators and wild beasts; apart from these the feast of *Bains* was more exciting, as it was more beautiful and varied.

I should like nothing better than to describe it in full, as I could from that Spanish book and from the accounts of eye-witnesses I have met; in particular I heard many details from Madame de Fontaine,²⁴ then a maid of honour to Queen Eleanour and known as Torcy; but no, I should be blamed for so great a digression. I shall keep it as a plum for another occasion, for it is well worth telling. But there was one part of the entertainment so good that I must mention it; I mean the great fortress of brick, which was attacked & defended & relieved, no less than six thousand veterans of the infantry being engaged in the display, with thirty pieces of artillery between the two sides. All the regular manœuvres of war were carried out, the siege actually lasting three days and a half; it was delightful to see at one time an assault, at another the entry of a relieving force & repulse of the attackers, as when the Prince of Piedmont arrived with a brigade of cavalry. At last the fortress was surrendered on terms, some of which were merciful and some severe; then was seen the pathetic sight of the garrison being marched away under escort. Nothing was forgotten that could make it more like real war; and the Emperor's pleasure in the display was boundless.

You may be sure the Queen's motive in this great expenditure was to shew her brother that whatever she had from him in the way of estates or pensions, whatever territory she had conquered and was holding in his name, all was vowed to his glory and pleasure. Well might the Emperor rejoice in her and sing her praises! While appreciating all her magnificence, he was specially pleased with the decoration of his bedroom, which was hung with high-warp²⁵ tapestry of great richness, threads of gold and silver crossing threads of silk; in which all his famous victories were represented, special prominence being given to his personal exploits; there he beheld the flight of Suliman before *Vienna*, and there the capture of

King Francis at *Pavia*. And all the furniture of his room was no less exquisite.

But all the glory of the house was soon to perish, for it was plundered and left in ruins by the French, in revenge for Queen Mary's raids, as I have told. When its mistress heard of its destruction her distress was pitiful, & it was long before her rage could be appeased. One day as she was passing near she went to see the ruins, and gazing at them with tears in her eyes, she swore that all France should be sorry for it; she would never rest until *Fontainebleau* itself, whose beauty they made such a song of, had been thrown down and no stone left standing on another. When it came to action her fury was vented chiefly on poor Picardy, whose nights were turned into day by the fires she lit through the country. But her vengeance would have gone further, I believe, if the truce had not come when it did, for she had a passionate heart not easy to mollify; indeed, she had the name with her own people as well as with ours of being rather cruel. But such is the nature of women when offended, even of the greatest; the Emperor, by all accounts, liked her only the better for it.

It is related that when he abdicated at *Brussels*, and in the great hall of assembly formally stripped himself of all imperial prerogatives, first he addressed the Estates General & the Prince his son, then gave particular thanks for her services to his sister Queen Mary, who had a seat beside his throne; in response to which she rose, and after a low curtsey to her brother, gracefully expressive of the deepest reverence, addressed the assembly in these words: 'My Lords & Gentlemen, throughout the twenty-three years that it has pleased my brother the Emperor to entrust to me the government of the Low Countries, I have employed in his service whatever gifts have been granted to me by God or by nature or by fortune, in the hope to discharge worthily that trust; so that if I have failed in any part of it, I have at least the excuse to offer that I spared no pains in the attempt but used my abilities to the utmost, & I beg you accordingly to pardon me. If there are any of you who will not accept my excuse, but cherish a resentment against me, I can still console myself that my

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brother the Emperor is not dissatisfied with me; and as it has always been my chief care to please him, the displeasure of any other will be a care lightly to be borne.' So saying, she again curtsied low to the Emperor, & resumed her seat. I have heard that this speech was not too well received, on account of its somewhat haughty and defiant tone, which was felt to be ill-timed at the surrender of her command; a more tender farewell would certainly have left a better taste in the mouth of the nation, and there would have been more regrets for her departure. But what did she care, who had no aim in the world but to please her brother? To this day she cares nothing for the good-will of the world, but only to keep her brother company in his retirement and life of prayer.

I heard the story from one of my brother's gentlemen, who was in *Brussels* at the time; he was negotiating the ransom of my brother, who had been taken prisoner in *Hedin*, & had been kept five years at *Lille* in *Flanders*. The said gentleman was present in the hall, & saw the Emperor go through the whole sad ceremony; he told me that many people were scandalized at the haughty words of the Queen, but dared not say so openly, seeing what a masterful lady they had to deal with; one who if provoked was quite capable, while she waved her hand in farewell, of bringing it down on the offender's head. Thus she was quit of her responsibilities, & away with her to Spain along with her brother; whose patient companion she was to the grave, she & her sister Queen Eleanour. All three of them died in successive years, the Emperor being taken first, then the Queen of France who was the eldest, & last the Queen of Hungary; the two sisters throughout their widowhood having behaved with becoming gravity, especially the Queen of Hungary who was longer a widow and never re-married. Her sister re-married twice, the second time being tempted by the Kingdom of France, which certainly was a dainty morsel; none the less she might have resisted it but for the entreaties of her brother, who persuaded her that she would serve as a seal to the peace, to make it more binding & give Europe rest from war. But alas! the seal was soon broken, and war let loose again as cruel as ever. It

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was no fault of the poor Queen, who did all in her power to maintain peace; and for her pains only incurred the displeasure of her husband, who always cursed the alliance, so I have heard.

¶ After the departure of the Queen of Hungary there was no great Princess with King Philip, now established sovereign lord in the Low Countries, except his cousin the Duchess of Lorraine, Christina of Denmark that was;⁴⁶ after her marriage she was styled Her Highness, and worthy company she was for King Philip so long as she remained, adding much to the brilliance of his Court. For there is no Prince, however great he may be, can afford to be without great ladies at his Court; it will be best recommended by a Queen having her own Court within it, nor can her ladies & her maids be too numerous; I say this from my own observation, but have heard some of the greatest gentlemen express the same opinion.

The Duchess of Lorraine was one of the most beautiful and accomplished Princesses I have seen; good features and a charming expression, figure tall & graceful, conversation witty & agreeable. But she was most distinguished for her style of dress, in fact she set the fashions, not only for her own ladies, but for those of the French Court also; she brought in a mode of dressing the hair and wearing the veil, which everywhere was known as the Lorraine. Nothing ever suited our ladies so well, and they wanted balls and spectacles every day to shew themselves off, all wearing the Lorraine in imitation of Her Highness. She had the prettiest pair of hands ever seen; I have heard the Queen-mother praise them greatly, while comparing them with her own. She sat a horse well & with an easy grace, always using the stirrup instead of the old-fashioned board,⁴⁷ which never admitted of a good style; it was Queen Mary her aunt who taught her to ride with the stirrup, and I have heard that the Duchess in turn taught the Queen-mother. In horsemanship she always followed her aunt & so would ride none but Spanish horses & Arabs; she had some beautiful jennets for cantering, I saw a string of a dozen once, and did not know which to admire the most. This aunt was very fond of her, both for the virtues she found in her & because they were so in sympathy about riding

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and hunting. The Duchess after her marriage went often to visit her aunt in Flanders, as I have heard from Madame de Fontaine; & after she had lost her husband and was deprived of her son, leaving Lorraine altogether in disgust, for she was of a very proud temper, she went to live with her aunt at the Imperial Court, where she was very welcome.

Yes, she bitterly resented the removal of her son, though King Henry made every excuse to her, and declared that he would adopt the boy himself. She was further distressed to learn that he had been given a new tutor, one M. de la Brousse, instead of the tutor chosen for him by the Emperor, the excellent M. de Montbardon; he was a French refugee whom the Emperor had seen in the service of M. de Bourbon, & whose merits he had thoroughly proved. So the Duchess in despair came to *Nancy* and confronted King Henry in the great gallery of the palace, one Good Thursday that he was there with all his Court; appearing in all her radiant beauty, she approached him with a graceful assurance, not in the least abashed by his grandeur, and made a low curtsy before him. Without rising, she appealed to him with tears in her eyes to undo the wrong he had done her, in taking away her son, the dearest thing she had in the world; looking even more beautiful through her tears, she pleaded that she did not merit such ruthless treatment, for she had never had so much as a disloyal thought to him and what she claimed was no more than the consideration due to her high birth. Her words were so well reasoned and so well spoken, with such a sweet pathos in her voice, that the King could not but be moved and likewise all the lords who accompanied him.

There never was in France a King more courteous to ladies, and now he answered her very patently. Paradin in his History²⁸ puts into the mouth of the King on this occasion a great rigmarole of an oration, which he never uttered at all, or anything like it; it was not in his nature to be long-winded or to express himself in set forms. There is no need for a King, nor does it become him, to imitate philosopher or advocate; a short soldierly speech, whether question or answer, is most proper to a King; & I have heard the same said by so great a person as M. de Pibrac,²⁹ whose

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wide experience gives weight to his opinion on any subject. You have only to read the speech in *Paradin* to be convinced that no King in the flesh ever delivered it; and to make this more certain I have heard from several great persons who were present that King Henry's answer was not pompous or spun out at all. He expressed a kindly sympathy, & told the Duchess she had no occasion to be distressed, since it was only to assure the boy's estate that he wished to have her son so near him, certainly not from any feeling of enmity to her; his own eldest son would be the companion of hers, they would take their meals together, have the same hours of study and play, and have the same money to spend. As her son was a Frenchman born, there was nowhere better for him to be brought up than in the French Court. Then he reminded her that the House of Lorraine was under more obligations to the House of France than to any in Christendom; and he instanced the danger the Duke of Lorraine had been in from that Duke of Burgundy who was afterwards killed before *Nancy*; there could be no question that but for the interference of the French the Duke of Lorraine would have lost his Duchy, and been left the most miserable Prince in the world. This plainly shewed to which the House of Lorraine was the more bound, whether to the House of France or to that of Burgundy; in saying this King Henry came to the point, for he suspected the Duchess of leanings toward the side of Burgundy, & was determined that her son should not be brought up in that school of thought. He proceeded to instance other services rendered by the French to the House of Lorraine, especially in the Holy War, when the French helped them to the capture of *Jerusalem* and the Kingdom of *Naples* and *Sicily*. Then he summed up by declaring that it was not in his nature to desire the ruin of Princes, but rather to help them out of difficulties; so he had done to the little Queen of Scots, his son's cousin, so to the Duke of Parma; as for Germany, it would have come under the heel of the oppressor but for his help. It was in the same spirit of generosity that he wished to have under his protection the young heir to Lorraine, with a view to raising him in the world by making him his son-

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in-law; yes, her son should marry a daughter of the King of France, and surely that was nothing for her to grieve over. But all these plausible arguments did not console the Duchess, or incline her any more to accept the fact. She remained silent, & curtseying again with a mother's tears running down her cheeks, retired to her room, the King escorting her to the door. The next day she was leaving *Nancy*, & the King came to her room to bid her farewell; but she found him as unrelenting as before. Then it was that she resolved, after seeing her son start on his journey into France, to leave Lorraine altogether; she would live in Flanders with her uncle the Emperor—aha! she liked the sound of Emperor!—and with her cousin King Philip & her two aunts, Queens—what glory to retire to! Thither she went and there remained, until the signing of peace between the two Kings, when she took ship with the King of Spain for his own country.

In the negotiations she gave good help; indeed it was due to her that they came to a settlement at all, for when she intervened the deputies of both sides, so I am told, had spent several arduous days in discussion at *Cercan* without any result. They were like hunters who have lost a scent, casting this way and that on the chance; till the Duchess of Lorraine, whether inspired by Heaven or acting by the light of her own wits, shewed which way a settlement was to be found, and led the negotiations to that conclusion so happy for all Christendom. No one could have been found better qualified for the moving and setting up of this pillar, and so said all; for she was a lady of wit & experience, whose authority was enhanced by her beauty; above all she had that manner which you will never find in persons of low birth. Her cousin King Philip could not say enough in her praise, and gave her his entire confidence, loving to have her near him; & as I have said before, she gave brilliance to a Court, which without her would have been dull and undistinguished. But alas! an occasion arose, so I have heard, when King Philip treated her none too well; for he coveted the estates which were bequeathed to her as jointure in the Duchy of Milan by her first husband, the Duke Sforza, & in his administration of these he embezzled a portion of her rents.

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They say that after the separation from her son she became an enemy of M. de Guise & her brother the Cardinal, for she blamed them for persuading the King; she said the Cardinal was ambitious to see his nephew married into the House of France, and that M. de Guise wished to spite her for refusing his offer of marriage some time before. She had replied in her haughty way that she would never marry the younger son after being married to the elder of the same house; and M. de Guise bore her a grudge ever after, though his pride might have been satisfied by the wife he got instead of her. For she came of a most distinguished house and was a grand-daughter of King Louis XII, one of the best and bravest who have sat on the throne of France; & what is more, she was the most beautiful woman in Christendom.

As to this I have heard that the first time these two famous beauties met, Madame de Guise and the Duchess of Lorraine, they studied one another so attentively, gazing from every angle, that it seemed they could never satisfy their eyes. Imagine, if you can, the thoughts which ran through their noble minds; much the same it must have been as when Scipio met Hannibal face to face, before that decisive battle in Africa which ended the Punic wars. We read that before the final engagement there was an armistice of a couple of hours, and the two generals met for a parley; so curious was each to see the other that when they came near both stood awhile absorbed, while the eyes of each tried to take in the image of a world-wide fame, to see in the features before him the valour & prowess he had heard so long sung. Then recovering themselves, they began that dialogue so well reported by Livy. What a wonder is valour, that can admire its like amid hatred and rivalry! Even so can beauty rise above jealousy, as in the mutual admiration of those two Princesses.

Certainly it would have been hard to choose between them, for if Madame de Guise had an advantage in perfection of feature, the other had it in majesty of presence; to this latter quality Madame de Guise did not aspire, for she was as kindly and modest as a Princess could be, short of sacrificing her dignity. At sight of the tall and stately figure which

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nature had given her, many feared or thought twice before addressing her, but found her in conversation tenderness itself, with a frank gaiety derived from her grandfather, called the father of his people, a quality which thrives in the sweet air of France. Yet when the occasion demanded a queenly dignity she was not found to be lacking. I hope to speak more particularly of her in another place.

Her Highness of Lorraine on the contrary was of a proud nature, and inclined to be presumptuous. I met her some time ago in company with the Queen of Scots, who after losing her husband visited Lorraine, where I happened to be; you would have said then that Her Highness wished to encroach on the Queen's dignity. But the other was very spirited and had her wits about her, so our presumptuous lady was able to take no advantage of her, nor even to ruffle her sweet serenity; also the Queen had had a description of her character from her uncle the Cardinal, and so was not surprised by her pretensions. Never could the Duchess get rid of her pride, though she managed to restrain it when she met the Queen-mother;³⁰ but that was a case of pride being met by a pride & a half. For the Queen-mother could be the haughtiest woman in the world, as I have seen for myself and heard many great persons tell; when she wished to humiliate some person she thought too-satisfied, she could bring them down to the earth, and to the centre of the earth! Yet she was not too severe with Her Highness, for she had a high regard for her, and gave some rein to her pride, now raising and now lowering her hand as was required; thus she took care for the Duchess' own sake that she should not forget herself and go too far.

Once the Queen said of her in my hearing, 'There goes the proudest woman I ever saw!' It was when the Duchess came to the coronation of King Charles IX at *Reims*. She would not enter the town on horse-back as she could not have made so grand a display; she rode in a magnificent coach, draped with black velvet in token of her widowhood, & drawn by four white Barbs, the most beautiful that could be chosen, all harnessed abreast as in a triumphal chariot. She herself was seen at the window in

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a most becoming robe, though all of black velvet too; which was set off by a head-dress of pure white, most elaborate and in its effect delightful. At the other window was one of her daughters, afterwards the Duchess of Bavaria;" and within sat her maid of honour, the Princess of Macedonia. The Queen wished to see her arrival in the court of the palace, and the unloading of all this splendour, so she put herself at the window, saying under her breath, 'There's a proud woman for you!' When the Duchess had dismounted and come upstairs, the Queen went forward to receive her, but not further than the middle of the hall, or very little further towards the door; and there she gave her a cordial welcome enough. The Duchess may well have been satisfied, for the Queen was supreme in the Kingdom then, her son being not yet of age to govern; he was entirely under her control and could only do what pleased her. All the Court admired Her Highness; her beauty was the talk of every circle, though she was now somewhat advanced in years, being over forty I suppose. But time seemed to work no change in her, & her autumn was more glorious than the summer of many. It is greatly to the credit of this lady that being so beautiful she kept her widowhood inviolate to the grave; she would never insult the ghost of her husband by a third marriage.

She died a year after receiving the news that she had succeeded to the throne of Denmark, her native country; & so, though she had the pleasure of changing at last her title of Highness for that of Majesty, she did not enjoy the higher title for long. If she could have kept the verdure of youth and beauty on condition of keeping the title she had with them, I expect she would have scorned the exchange, ambitious though she was; for what are Kingdoms and Empires compared with the gift of youth? As that could not be, no doubt it was a gratification to her to bear the title of Queen before she died; all the same I have heard it said, that even had she lived she would never have entered her Kingdom, for she was resolved to end her days on her Italian estate at *Tortona*. Thither she had retired many years before, and from her simple life was known to the country-folk only as the Lady of Tortona, a humble title indeed for so great a

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personage; and now she was unwilling to leave the district, partly on account of some vows she had made to the local saints, & partly on account of the baths there, for she suffered much from gout in her later years.

She was always occupied in good works, giving many gifts to the poor, especially to widows; among others she helped poor Madame Castellane of Milan, whom we saw at Court dragging out a miserable existence, in dependence on the charity of the Queen-mother. She was a daughter of the Princess of Macedonia, and so came of a great House; when I saw her she was a venerable woman of great age. In former days she had been governess to Her Highness, who hearing now of her distress sought her out and invited her to come and live near her; after which through her kindness Madame Castellane forgot the unhappy days she had spent in France.

That concludes what I have to say of this great Princess, and the virtuous life she led, though widowed in the flower of her beauty. It may be objected that she shewed little constancy to the memory of her first husband, the Duke Sforza; granted, but he died within a year of the marriage, & she found herself a widow while still a child of fifteen or sixteen. It was her uncle the Emperor who gave her in marriage then to the Duke of Lorraine, as part of his policy for confirming alliances. But she hardly reached the prime of her life before she was widowed again, having had but a few short years of happy marriage; those that remained to her were the fittest for the enjoyment of life, and she consumed them in a widowhood of chaste retirement.

¶ While on this subject, I must say a word or two of some other beautiful widows. In times past there was Madame Blanche of Montferrat, one of the ancient Houses of Italy, who became Duchess of Savoy;³² she was one of the most beautiful and accomplished Princesses of her day, and being left a widow and a mother at the age of twenty-three, surprised all by the good judgment she shewed, both in the management of her estates and in the education of her son.

She it was who entertained so worthily little King Charles VIII when

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on his way to the Kingdom of *Naples*; for she provided an entertainment in every town of hers that he must pass through, the chief being in her capital of *Turin*, where she was to meet him herself. He was escorted into the town with great pomp, the Duchess leading the procession in sumptuous robes; truly she shewed that day a consciousness of her high estate, for her robe was of cloth-of-gold with a fringe of gold threads, and blazed with diamonds and rubies and other precious stones, as did her head-dress also. Round her neck she had a carcanet of great pearls of the Orient, beyond all price, & on her arms had bracelets to match. She was mounted on a beautiful white horse, in superb harness, beside which walked six tall footmen in figured cloth-of-gold. Next in the procession came a company of young ladies, looking very dainty in the Piedmontese costume; and these were followed by a troop of gentlemen and knights of the district. Then came King Charles under a rich canopy; and when he dismounted at the castle appointed for his lodging the Duchess presented her little son to him at the gate, & made him a pretty speech of welcome, surrendering to him all the lands and wealth both of herself and her son. The young King was delighted by his reception, & thanked her from his heart, being deeply touched by all her generosity. Throughout the town the arms of France and of Savoy were displayed together, the two shields being bound together by a true-lovers' knot, with this motto underneath, '*Sanguinis arctus amor*, Close is the bond of blood;' as you may read in the Chronicle of Savoy.³³

I have heard it said by some of the last generation, who had it first-hand from the generation before them, that when the courtiers who accompanied the young King returned to France, all their talk was of the beauty and good government of the Duchess of Savoy; they entertained the ladies of the Court with endless stories of her, and as for the young King himself, he looked as if smitten with the dart of love. I heard the same myself from my grandmother, the Seneschal's wife of *Poitou*,³⁴ who in those days was a maid of honour.

But apart from her beauty, he had good reason to love the Duchess;

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for when he ran short of money she helped him all she could, stripping herself of her jewels and lending them to him to pawn as he liked. That was no small sacrifice, for ladies have great affection for their jewels and ornaments, and would sooner lend or pawn some precious part of their bodies; I mean some ladies, not all of course. Without this generous aid, and a like aid from the Marchioness of Montferrat, our King would have had a long experience of short credit, till for lack of money he had been obliged to cut short his tour & return; nearly as bad as the French Bishop who went to the Council of Trent without either money or Latin! That indeed was a case of putting to sea without biscuit! But there was this difference between our King and the Bishop; the young King's impetuosity, his disregard for necessities, sprang from a gallant self-reliance; whereas the Bishop was simply a fool, and his ignorance unpardonable, unless perhaps he thought to make a collection on his arrival!

In the account I have given of the entry into *Turin*, the personal adornments of the Duchess may suggest that she thought of herself rather as a wife than as a widow; but ladies used to hold in those days that in honour of a King it was allowable to put off a widow's weeds, though on no other plea. It was a law they made for themselves, as lords and ladies can. In any case it was not the fashion then for widows to be so close-veiled and dismal-looking as they have become in the last forty years. To shew how fashions may change, I know of a lady in whom the King took pleasure, intimate pleasure I mean, and she began to dress in more modest style in order to divert suspicion from her secret gaiety; as it became her very well, the widows of the Court proceeded to imitate her style, which on their side meant an approach towards gaiety, for her dresses were still of silk. Nor were they very severe in cut, but of a tasteful elegance always; only they were black and white. Especially she liked to give a good view of her pretty neck, & that was a nice fashion for widows to be adopting!

The Queen-mother was another I heard say that widows in former times were not so strict in their dress and demeanour as now; for King Francis liked much liberty at his Court; in his reign she remembered

seeing widows dancing, and being treated with no more reverence than wives and maids. It was at the coronation and marriage of King Henry III that she said this, quoting the fact as a precedent, when she desired M. de Vaudemont¹⁵ to lead out the widowed Princess of Condé¹⁶ to dance in honour of the occasion. And he actually went through a whole dance with the Princess, as all will remember who like me were at the Coronation and saw it; such was the freedom allowed to widows in the past. To-day it would be thought sacrilege in a widow to dance, and as for colours, they dare not wear anything but black and white; though their petticoats and the linings of their skirts, as well as their stockings, may be grey, violet, blue or tawny. Some few I have seen so independent as to wear red, flesh-pink, or chamois-yellow, just as in the old days, when all colours were permitted in stockings and petticoats, so I am told, provided the dress was black and white.

But there was another reason why this Duchess we were speaking of, though a widow, might without offence wear cloth-of-gold on such an occasion; it was the ducal robe of ceremony, by which she only expressed the sovereign dignity of her rank, as it was proper for her to do; for the same reason all our Duchesses & Countesses to this day wear their robes on State occasions. Other wise our widows are a sisterhood of gloom, and dare not wear jewels except in a ring or the buckle of a belt, no coronets or pendants of diamonds, no collars or bracelets of clustered pearls; though some of them take the gems out of these and have them set in their Books of Hours, to be able still to shew them. For all that, I swear I have seen widows looking as attractive in their black and white as any wife or maid of France in her butterfly array.

¶ That is enough about the Italian widow, let us return to those of our own country; in particular I want to touch now on the widowhood of Louise of Lorraine, already mentioned as wife of King Henry III. This was a Princess who can hardly be over-praised. In her marriage she conducted herself with such loyal chastity that the knot which bound her to her husband was never even loosened, though for his part he let his fancy

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room enough; but that means little in great Princes, whose liberty in love has become a law. A more real grievance she had in an early act of his, when he marred the happiness of the first fortnight of marriage by taking from her the maids & ladies of her chamber; some of these had been her nurses in childhood, and others had come to her as children themselves and been brought up by her, so it was a hard wrench to be parted from them. Her heart ached especially for Mademoiselle de Changy, a most worthy lady, whom it was a shame to banish from the Court and her mistress' company; what the Queen must have felt may be imagined, for nothing is so bitter as to lose a good and trusted friend.

She bore no children to the King, and there seems to have been reasons relating to him, at least many were alleged at the time, which made it certain that she never should.³⁷ On this subject I have heard that one day a lady to whom the Queen allowed much intimacy, made so bold as to advise her, by way of a joke, that she would do well to borrow the services secretly of some third party, who would give her children; thus her authority would be assured in the event of the King's death, for she would be Queen-mother and rank as high as did her mother-in-law now. But the lady long regretted her humorous advice, for the Queen took it very badly, and never after liked her well-meaning friend; she preferred to assure her authority by a virtuous life than by sons the issue of vice. Yet from a worldly point of view the advice was not to be despised, it was in accordance with the doctrine of Macchiavelli.

¶ It is said that Mary of England,³⁸ third wife of King Louis XII, took a less exalted view, when she became doubtful of her husband's powers; for she determined to sound this ford, & took as her guide to its waters the Count of Angoulême, afterwards King Francis I. He was then a handsome and charming young Prince to whom she had always shewn herself very gracious, calling him 'My respected son-in-law;' for he was already married to Princess Claude, the King's daughter. To tell the truth she was in love with him, as he had been with her at first sight;³⁹ & they were very near giving rein to their desires when the late M. de Grignaux⁴⁰ put

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a spoke in her wheel. He was a noble lord of *Perigord*, who had been equerry to Queen Anne, as before mentioned, and now was the same to Queen Mary; and much experience had made him a wise man. Seeing the comedy that was about to be staged, he took the Count of Angoulême aside & remonstrated with him sharply on the folly of such an act, saying, 'What are you about? God's Death!' it was his favourite oath, 'can you not see that this is a designing woman, who is drawing you on in the hope of having a child by you? And if that happens where are your hopes of the French crown? you will be simple Count of Angoulême to the end of your days! You know very well the King is now too old to give her a child, and you of all men to think of getting into her bed! Young and hot as you both are, she'll hold you as bird-lime till you give her a son, and a fine day's work you'll have done for yourself! Then indeed you may say, 'Goodbye to my Kingdom of France, goodbye to all my dreams!' M. d'Angoulême thought over what was said to him, & promised to be wise and leave the affair alone; but being tempted continually by the caresses and the play of this English beauty, he abandoned himself to her worse than ever. What a power is the fire of love! to think that for a little morsel of flesh men will throw away kingdoms and empires, as history shews that they have done again and again!

This Queen would have been a good example of the Spanish proverb, '*Nunca muger aguda murio sin herederos*, a clever woman never died without heirs;' meaning that if her husband fail to give them to her she will call in a second man to do it. But at last M. de Grignaux, seeing that the young man was recklessly going on with the affair, spoke to his mother Madame d'Angoulême; who gave him such a furious lecture, that this time he left his folly for good.

Still the Queen did not give up scheming to bring it about, that she should reign as Queen-mother after her husband's death; only he died too soon for her to get a child that might be his. Even then she did not give up, but circulated a rumour that she was pregnant; it is said that she made herself big by wrapping bandages round her body, since there was

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no child to swell her from within. Little by little she added to the bandages, and as the term of months drew to an end, procured a woman with a new-born son, which was to be smuggled into her bed at the time of her pretended delivery. All very nice, but Madame d'Angoulême, now Queen-regent, happened to know something about child-bearing; and as she saw things were going too smoothly to suit her and her son, being a crafty Savoyard she had the Queen first watched, and then examined by physicians & midwives. The result was that the precious bandages were discovered, & the fraud exposed; so instead of becoming Queen-mother, Mary of England was sent back to her own country.

¶ See the difference between her and Queen Louise, a woman so chaste and upright, that she would seek power by means of a true and natural child, far less by a fictitious one. And had she wished to play such a trick, nothing could have been easier for her, since there was no woman interested in detecting it, though plenty of people would have been astonished. So the present King owes his crown to her virtue, and should love and honour her above all women; had she been crafty and produced an infant, he who is now King would only have been a petty ruler in France; aye, and perhaps he would not even have a quiet life to thank her for, since a small charge often involves more wars and troubles than a great.

I have spoken to some, and there were clergy among them, who had come to the conclusion that she would have done better to play this trick on the nation; which then would not have suffered such loss of life and property in civil strife, and the religion of Christ would have been advanced on earth. It is a question I must leave to subtler minds to pronounce on; myself I cannot take that view, for we are very well off under our present King, God bless him! But even if it had been for the glory of the State, and this seems a possible contention, it would not have been for the glory of God, which was always our Queen's first thought; so bent was she on His service indeed, & so wrapped up in love of Him, that she forgot both her own advantage and what might be owing to her place in the world. Young and beautiful as she was, having been chosen indeed

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for her personal charms, her only joy was the service of God and of her less fortunate neighbours; when not at her devotions she was visiting hospitals, nursing the poor or burying their dead, till she became by her good works a counterpart in our time of the saintly Queens of the primitive Church. After the death of the King her husband she continued her charitable work, the while she mourned him and prayed to God for his soul; so that in widowhood her life was the same as in marriage.

She was suspected during her husband's life-time of a leaning towards the party of the Union, and it would only have been natural, good Christian and Catholic as she was, that she should love those who upheld her Faith both in battle and in debate; but after they had killed her husband she never loved them more, nor had any dealings with them. She left it to God to send down what vengeance might please Him; though at first she appealed to men, which meant to the new King, with whom it lay to claim jurisdiction, in the case of so enormous a crime, over a man exempt from law by privilege of clergy."

She was far-famed for virtue when at last she died," after languishing long in a series of parching fevers, said to have been brought on by the severity of her life. Her death was beautiful, worthy of a saint. In her last hours she had her crown brought and set up on the end of her bed, above her head, as a token not so much of glory as of service; there it was to remain so long as she breathed, and when she died it was to be placed on her head, and she was to lie crowned while above ground; such were her last instructions.

¶ She left a sister, Madame de Joyeuse," who in widowhood imitated her by living chaste and mourning continually; for she also had a good husband, a brave & courteous Lord. When the present King was in such straits in *Dieppe*, besieged & as you might say bottled up by M. du Mayne with forty thousand men, I have heard it said that if Madame de Joyeuse had been in command of the garrison instead of M. de Chastes," she would have known better than he how to avenge the death of her husband; she declared that he owed it to her not to shelter the King, and ever

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after she hated him like the plague, though others defend him on the ground that he was only keeping faithfully a promise he had made. But once a woman takes offence, whether justly or unjustly, nothing will pacify her; this one never could love the present King, whereas she wore mourning for the late King & sincerely regretted his death, even though he was of the League; that did not matter, she said, because her husband and she were under great obligations to him. To sum up, she is a good and wise Princess, who is to be honoured for her devotion to the memory of her husband, even if it was only for a time, until she married secondly M. de Luxembourg. But what would you, and she so young? was she to burn for ever?

¶ Another widow distinguished for constancy was Madame de Guise; before marriage she was Catherine of Cleves, one of three daughters of the House of Nevers, who were all most praiseworthy ladies, as well for their beauty as for their virtue; but I have devoted a chapter to them elsewhere. To the end of her days Madame de Guise never tired of lamenting with all the signs & ceremonies of grief, the passage of her husband into the eternal beyond; and well she might regret him, for what a husband he was! His peer was not in all the world, indeed her favourite epithet for him was peerless, as I know from many letters of hers I have read; they were written after her bereavement to intimate friends, to whom she opened her heart in tragic words, shewing the deep wound that never could be healed.

¶ Her sister-in-law too, Madame de Montpensier,⁴⁵ of whom I hope to speak more fully elsewhere, wept bitterly for her husband; and though at the time of his death she was still young and beautiful, with a beauty of mind that added to the attraction of her body, she never thought of re-marrying. One can hardly say that she had tasted the joys of marriage once, for her husband was more like a grandfather to her; not that he was much beyond middle age, but she herself was such a tender child when he took her; so there was much owing to her of life's pleasures, which might have fairly justified her entering on a second marriage.

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¶ I have heard many lords and ladies express wonder that the Dowager Princess of Condé, of the House of Longueville, never married again; for she was one of the most beautiful and attractive ladies in France, and being very young, had a long period of widowhood before her when she accepted that state with such contentment. But she only followed the example of her mother, the Marchioness of Rothelin, who was widowed as young as she and never re-married. Both mother and daughter could set a Kingdom on fire with a glance of their lovely eyes, which at the French Court & throughout the country were declared to be irresistible. Nor is there any doubt that many a heart burned for one or other of these ladies; but to make to either a proposal of second marriage was felt to be hopeless, so loyal did they stand to their first vows.

¶ If I were to name all the great ladies at the Courts of our Kings who shewed a like virtue in widowhood, the list in itself would fill a volume; so I leave their praises for another time, & turn now to ladies of humbler rank, who in this matter shewed an equal nobility. Firstly there was Madame de Randan, known as Fulvia Mirandola,⁴⁷ who came of the respectable House of Admirande; she had beauty and was widowed in the flower of life, yet she never re-married. So bitterly did she mourn her loss that she could never bear to look into her mirror after; thus she denied to the clear glass the joy of holding in its depths the beauty of her face. Hers was not the reason given by Lais of old, in dedicating her mirror to Venus, according to the Latin poet:

47^c Dico tibi Veneri speculum, quia cernere talem

Qualis sum nolo, qualis eram nequeo.

Now, Venus, in thy shrine I hang

This mirror all too true;

Which of myself as I have been

No longer gives a view,

But shews to my unwilling eyes

What I am changed into.'

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Madame de Randan had no quarrel with her mirror on this account, for she was still beautiful; she only put it away in fulfilment of a vow, made over the dead body of her husband. He was one of the most knightly gentlemen in all France, and for his sake she left all worldly delights; she dressed with a religious austerity, her head entirely covered by a veil, and little care given to the dressing of her hair; yet in spite of herself, what shewed of her hair was beautiful & lovely. The last M. de Guise always called her the nun, but only in friendly banter, for he loved and honoured her greatly for her devotion to his House.

¶ Madame de Carnavalet,⁴⁸ after being twice widowed, refused to take a third husband. She was greatly desired by M. d'Epéron, then known as M. de la Vallette the younger, who fell in love with the beauty which she still had in abundance; first he sought to be her lover, and failing in this pressed her earnestly to marry him, even getting the King to speak to her several times on his behalf. But she would never submit to the yoke of marriage again, though the wrong she did herself in refusing so great a match was pointed out to her by her best friends, among whom I may include myself, for I was very devoted to her; we told her that La Vallette, as first favourite of the King and almost his second self, would put her at the very source and centre of greatness, whence radiate all wealth and dignity and favour. She answered that her happiness now lay not in that direction, but in the liberty to lead her own life; she had had enough of marriage, and would have company in the memory of her two husbands, the Count of Montravail and M. de Carnavalet.

¶ My own sister-in-law Madame de Bourdeille,⁴⁹ who came of the ancient and illustrious House of Montbron, and so was descended from the Counts of Périgord and the Viscounts of Aunay, was widowed at the age of thirty-seven or thirty-eight, when she was still very beautiful; I believe that in all her native *Guienne* there was none to surpass her in beauty and charm, for she had the stateliest figure ever seen, at once tall & luxurious, with which she combined an equal beauty of mind. It is not surprising then, that this widow was wooed, not by one but by three great lords of

rich estates; but to each of them she answered alike: 'I will not be so positive as those ladies who declare that they will never, never marry again, and take such oaths that it is impossible to doubt them; but this I will say, that unless God or the flesh effect a change in my mind, I have said goodbye to marriage for ever.' One of them answered her, 'What, Madam? will you be burnt up in the beautiful spring-time of your life?' To this she said, 'I don't know what you mean by being burnt up; at present I find a difficulty in keeping myself warm, alone as I am in an icy bed of widowhood. Had I the company of a second husband, then I don't say but I might burn as you suggest, through proximity to his fire; and so, as heat is less easily endured than cold, I am resolved to continue in my present state of widowhood.' She has been as good as her word; it is now ten years since she lost her husband, & not only has she never taken another, but has kept herself pure and spotless though her beauty remains as fresh as ever. In this she pays great honour to her husband's ashes, and bears witness to the love she had for him in life; for which it will be the duty of her children to hold her name for ever in honour, and to tell their children in turn how she died a widow.

The late M. d'Estrozze had been one of her suitors, through an intermediary; but great as he was by his connexion with the Queen-mother, she gracefully declined the honour. What a fancy for a woman to take, who was beautiful & well-born and a great heiress, to pass the good nights remaining to her on a lonely mattress, under a lonely blanket, a frozen hermit to the end! How different are many ladies, and yet how many are like her! Of these latter I should never be done telling; especially if I were to add to the list of Christian widows the virtuous pagans also, like the fair & gentle *Martia*, that saint of ancient *Rome*. She was the second daughter of *Cato of Utica*, and sister to *Portia*; after losing her husband she bewailed him incessantly, and being asked when the period of her mourning would end, replied that the last day of it would come with the last day of her life. Sometimes she was asked when she would re-marry, and to this she would answer, 'When I meet a man who desires me for

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my virtues rather than for my wealth;' for she was very rich, as well as beautiful. But of virtue she had as much, or more even than she had of beauty and riches; else she had not been Cato's daughter, or Portia's sister. That was a hard saying of hers, & in making it her answer to suitors she gave such a prick to their consciences, that they had to confess, to themselves if not to her, it was her wealth they were after rather than her virtue, even though this latter was the richer part of her dowry; so they would hang their heads and slink off, and she had no further trouble from them.

¶ The worthy Saint Jerome, in a letter to a virgin called Principia, sings the praises of a Roman lady called Marcella. She came of a noble house and in her pedigree were endless consuls and proconsuls and prætors; yet being widowed at an early age, she never married again. She was much sought after, being so young a person of so old a house, & having a figure that turned the heads of all the men; so says Saint Jerome, as if speaking for himself, and what the Saint took such note of must have been worth noting. But it appears she was also admired for her virtuous life, and among the admirers was a rich lord called Cerealis, of a line of consuls like himself, who pressed her to take him as a second husband. And as he was well on in years, he promised to settle on her much land and goods; by which he won the support of her mother called Albina, who strongly urged Principia to accept the proposal. But she only answered, 'If it were my desire to make another plunge into marriage, and take the chance of entangling myself in weeds, instead of standing firm on my vow of chastity, at least I should take a husband and not a parchment deed.' But the suitor thought when he heard this that she feared he had too short a time to live, and it was therefore an expression of love; so he said to her very confidently, that often the old live on, while the young are taken. To this she replied shortly that the young might or might not be taken, but it was certain that the old must be; and after that he retired.

¶ I admire this lady's resolute answer, and Martia's also, but cannot say the same for her sister Portia; who on the death of her husband resolved

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to live no longer, that is to say, to take her own life. When her intention was known, all weapons were put out of her reach; but she swallowed red coals and burned all her entrails, saying that a lady of courage need never lack means to embrace death. This is very well told in Martial's epigram on Portia, which is one of his most beautiful. But did she shew such great courage in taking her life, and did her husband in the same act? this is a question that may be asked in most cases of suicide, & there are philosophers who answer it by a general negative, notably the great Aristotle in his *Ethics*, where he discusses the quality of fortitude. He argues that persons in taking their lives face the lesser of two evils, otherwise they could have no motive for the act; and I myself have argued to the same effect elsewhere. How much greater would it have been in this lady to live on and mourn her husband, and perhaps to take vengeance on those who drove him to suicide; what she did served no purpose except to gratify her vanity, as I have heard those say who condemn her. For all that I cannot condemn her myself, to me the main fact is that she loved her husband in death as well as in life, & for this in any woman I have nothing but praise. Remember how Saint Paul praised such widows, and this teaching he had received from his great Master.

All the same it is a fact, so I learn from the most enlightened authorities, that young & beautiful widows who consume their flowering-time in a rigorous chastity, do too great violence to nature; and this is recognized in the law of God, which requires no woman to deny herself in this way, widows being permitted to re-marry and so eat again of the sweet fruit. Still many abstain for sake of some wrong-headed vow, which they have made to the vague and empty shades of their husbands; thus they bind themselves fantastically to those lost sentinels of the other world, who once they have arrived in the Elysian Fields give no thought to their wives that were, unless it be to make mock of their delusions. On this subject young widows should read the remonstrances, at once so sweet & so reasonable, made to Dido by her sister Anne; they are in the beautiful fourth book of the *Æneid*, & should convert any young & beautiful

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woman from those vows of lifelong widowhood, which are certainly more pedantic than religious. One could better understand such abnegation were it the custom at yearly feasts for widows to appear crowned with wreaths of flowers, as do our marriageable virgins, for then they would have a triumph and hear their praises sung, and this repeatedly as the flowers come up each year. Such a custom there was in the past, but all they receive to-day are some fleeting commendations when they take the vow, a triumph which is buried with the husband's body and with it turns to dust. So what I say is, let young widows and beautiful fix their thought on the upper world, since that is where their way lies; and let them leave to old women the pious vow of lifelong widowhood.

¶ Enough has been said now of fasting widows, let us turn now to those who hate the excessive virtue which scorns a second marriage, and again invoke the tender & compassionate god Hymen. Firstly there are those who in their husbands' life-time loved others only too well, and have already formed projects with these their lovers for the day of liberty. 'Ah! if my husband were dead,' these wives have whispered in their lovers' arms, 'we could do this & that, we could live as we liked & share all enjoyments; & trust me to put on such an air of shyly yielding that none would ever suspect our previous loves! How gaily we could live then, going to *Paris* and to Court, and arranging our affairs so that nothing could trouble us! We should advance ourselves by pretended infidelities, you making love to some lady of influence & I to some gentleman; thus we should get favour after favour from the King. The care of our children we should leave to tutors and nurses, and attend only to our own interests, unless indeed we could touch the estates of our children pending their majority! But there would be little need, for I know where are my husband's title-deeds, and how to lay my hands on the golden crowns; we shall have his house and furniture too, so that all may be spent on gay living.' And so on and so forth, the burden of it all being, 'Who should be as happy as we, if my husband were dead?'

¶ Such are the brave plans these wives make with their lovers, somewhat

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previously; some of whom are content thus to kill their husbands in thought and word, while others actually hurry them on their way to the grave, as is proved daily in cases coming before our High Court of Parliament. Few of them, I am glad to say, do as that Spanish lady, who after killing her husband for his ill-treatment of her, then killed herself; she even wrote an epitaph, which was found pinned to her dressing-table, and went as follows:

*'Aquí yaze qui a buscado una muger,
Y con ella casado, no l'ha podido hazer muger,
A las otras, no a mí, cerca mí, dava contentamiento.
Y por este, y su flaqueza y atriuvimiento,
Yo lo he matado,
Por le dar pena de su pecado:
Ya muy tan bien, por falta de muy juicio,
Y por dar fin a la mal-adventura qu'yo avio.
—Here lies a man who took a woman for life,
But marrying could not make of her a wife;
To others, not to me, he brought content,
So feeble at once he was and insolent.
Now in the creature I have plunged his sword,
To give his worthlessness its right reward;
And to myself, whose judgment was to blame,
To end a ruined life I do the same.'*

This lady was called Donna Madallena de Soria; in the opinion of some she did well to kill her husband for the reasons given, but I cannot help thinking she was a great fool to kill herself also; it was in that chiefly that she shewed the lack of judgment she speaks of. She would have done better to enjoy herself afterwards, though it may have been that she had fears of the Law, and preferred to be her own executioner rather than give the satisfaction to some judge. I promise you there have been some, and are to this day, much cleverer than she; I mean wives who play their

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game so well and so guardedly that they get the husband safely underground, and there they are with their gallants very much alive; it is no longer a case of a nod and a promise, but Love throws open the door with true hospitality.

But there are other widows more virtuous & sober, who having truly loved their husbands in life, could not behave so heartlessly on losing them; these weep for them so bitterly & are so prostrate with grief, that to see them stretched across the bier you would think them dead themselves. 'Ah! Ah!' they cry, 'am I not the most miserable woman in the world? Whose loss can be compared to mine? O God, wilt thou not grant me to die to-day, that I may follow him and be near him again? Truly I wish not to live after him; for what remains to me in the world, or what can come into my life, to give me comfort? If it were not for these little children, that he has left to me as pledges of our love, if it were not that they need protection still, I should kill myself here and now. Cursed be the hour in which I was born! Oh, if I could but see him in a vision or a dream, if any magic could conjure up his ghost for me, I should be only too happy again. My love, my life, is there no way that I can follow you? how gladly would I go to some secret place, & there do myself to death! Alas! what shall make life supportable for me, now that you have gone out of it, you for whose sake I once clung to life, and now as passionately yearn for death! Is it not better for me to die while still I feel the warmth of your love about me, and glory and happiness are not become strangers to my heart; is it not better so to die, than to draw out ingloriously a life of misery? Oh God! what torment is his absence to me! Oh, if he could but walk in at the door now, how I should rise on wings of pure joy, out of this prison-house I am now in! How lovely was my love & beautiful, my knight how perfect in all virtues! A second Mars, a second Adonis! And to me a saint, so tender was his love, so patient all his care. But I have lost him, and all my happiness is lost.' So do our sorrowing widows pour out their hearts over the bodies of their husbands, not all in the same words and style, but all to the same effect as the example I have given.

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Some rail against Heaven, others accuse Earth; some blaspheme God and others curse men; some faint or counterfeit death, others rant and rave as if possessed, recognizing no one and refusing to answer questions; there is no end to the different forms grief may take. Often these are hypocritical displays, mere affectations of grief to impress the world; I do not say that all are such, but very many certainly are. Then the consolations of friends, who follow a custom in all good faith, are so much labour wasted. Sometimes these accept the fraud without being deceived, regarding it as a customary performance like their own consolations; I know of a lady who was once heard giving instruction to her widowed daughter, who was not playing her part of inconsolable mourner with proper effect, saying to her, 'Do a faint, my dear; you are not dramatic enough.'

After these solemn rites of grief have been performed, the widows would remind you of a torrent, which has made its swollen rush, perhaps overflowing its banks, and now settles down to its regular pace and volume; even so the widows settle down to their natural ways, their sky clears & cheerfully they look on the beauty of the world. Instead of the death's-heads they wore in cameos & brooches, instead of the cross-bones looped with little toils-of-death, instead of the tears in jet or enamel, you see them content with miniatures of their husbands hung round their necks; the frames of these may be adorned with a tiny skull or a tear, but they will be set in such pretty scroll-work, that only enough of their tragic character will remain to save the picture from being taken for a worldly vanity. In this stage the widows are like birds when they first leave the nest, which do not venture at first on a flight, but only hop from branch to branch until they have learnt the use of their wings; so widows when they come out of deep mourning, do not immediately spread their wings and shew themselves to the world, but take their liberty little by little. At last they leave off mourning altogether, throw their veils on the rubbish-heap and give their thoughts wholly to love; which may mean a second marriage, or whatever gallantries attract them. So much

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for emotional displays; their grief might have been more lasting if its expression had been more restrained.

¶ I knew a very beautiful lady who was in such despair at the death of her husband that she pulled out her hair in handfuls and tore the skin off her face and neck, continuing to do so for days. When she was remonstrated with for so disfiguring herself, she cried, 'My God! what use have I for this face? for whom should I restrain myself now that my husband is no more?' Eight months later this lady was putting on Spanish red and powdering her hair; there was a change for you!

¶ The best example I can give of this sort is the story of a fair and honest lady of *Ephesus*, whom her friends and relations sought in vain to console for the loss of her husband; having followed him to the grave with sobs and wails, and having shed floods of tears on the coffin as it was lowered, she could not be prevented from jumping down after it. There she swore that she would never be parted from it, and bade them leave her to die of hunger in the grave, that her last days might be spent with the body of her beloved husband; and she actually remained there without food for two or three days. Now it happened at the same time that in the neighbouring town a man was condemned to death for some crime, and was brought out to a gibbet near the graveyard to be hanged; after which the body there dangling in the wind was guarded by soldiers, according to custom, that it might serve as a warning to criminals. Well, one night the soldier on guard heard a voice hard by as of a woman wailing, and going towards it found that it came from a grave; then climbing down he beheld this lady, as beautiful as day, with tears streaming down her face. Seating himself beside her he asked the cause of her distress, & the poor creature was glad to pour out her heart to him; he tried his best to comfort her, but having no success he left her for a while, and then returned. This he did two or three times, until he won her from her despair, and persuaded her to dry her eyes and give him a smile; so completely did she yield to his persuasions indeed, that in the end he had sweet enjoyment of her body, the coffin of her husband serving them for a bed! At parting

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they vowed to marry; then the soldier, very pleased with himself, returned to his watch beneath the gibbet, which he had left at the risk of his life.

But though he had prospered so in this adventure, his fortune had another side to it; for while he was enjoying himself away from his post, up came the relations of this poor swinging corpse to cut it down if only they could catch the sentry napping. Not finding him there at all, they swiftly carried it away to bury decently; for so they would save the dead man from being a foul and grisly spectacle to the world, and themselves from sharing in the disgrace as his relatives. When the soldier found the body missing, he ran in dismay to his lady to tell her of the disaster, which meant that he himself would take the place of the other on the gibbet; for so it was ordered by law in the case of a sentry sleeping on duty, and letting the body be carried off. It was now the lady's turn to console the soldier, who needed it as much as she had before; nor did she fail, but was happily able to provide what alone could save him: 'Do not let that trouble you,' she said, 'only help me to take my husband out of his coffin, and we can hang him in place of the other, for whom he will be taken by all.' This they actually did; and as the first corpse was said to have an ear missing, the lady cut off one of her husband's, that he might impersonate the other the better. The officer made his inspection the next day, and had nothing to say; so she saved her gallant by this villainous outrage on her husband, she who had lamented his loss so tragically! Truly the issue was a climb-down for the lady that no one could have foreseen.

The first time I heard this story it was told by M. d'Aurat³⁰ at a dinner given by the gallant M. du Gua; nor did our host fail to appreciate it, for there was no man in the world loved a good story more, or could turn one to better account. For example, when he came into the Queen's chamber a while after, he saw a young and beautiful lady newly widowed, whose face was all tear-stained and her veil down below her nose; truly a pitiful sight she was, and grudging of a word to anyone; suddenly M. du Gua whispered to me, 'Do you see that one? before a year is out she will do as

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the lady of *Ephesus*.' And so she did; not surrendering quite so ignominiously perhaps, but marrying again, & that with a man of low condition.

The story was told me also by M. de Beau-Joyeux, gentleman of the chamber to the Queen-mother, & the best violin player in Christendom. He was not only a consummate musician, but was also a man of pleasant wit, & had a great stock of anecdotes of an out-of-the-way sort; of which he was not stingy among his intimate friends. Besides what he had collected he had adventures of his own to tell, for in his time he had had many love-affairs; what with his gift for music and his daring wit, two good weapons in the field of love, he might well have been a favourite with the ladies. He came to the Queen-mother from the Marshal of Brissac, who sent him to her from *Piedmont* when she became Regent, and his excellent orchestra along with him; at that time he was called Baltazarin, but changed his name after. It was he who composed those beautiful ballets which are always danced at Court. He was great friends with M. du Gua and myself, and we had many a talk together; he always told us some good story, generally of the loves & pretty devices of ladies, among them being that of the lady of *Ephesus*, which we had already heard from M. d'Aurat. The latter said he got it from Lampridius;" myself I have seen it in a book called *Funerals*, an amusing work dedicated to the late M. de Savoye.

A digression, some will say, that I might have left out! true, but I wished to speak of my old friend, of whom this story reminded me. For he himself often used to remind me of the story when he saw one of our tear-stained widows; 'There is one,' he would say, 'who will one day play the part of our lady of *Ephesus*, if indeed she has not played it already.' Certainly it was a tragi-comedy not to be forgotten, ending as it did with such an inhuman act, the desecration by a woman of her dead. She might have been pardoned had she done as a lady of our own times, who on the death of her husband cut off certain parts of his body, as the centre and forefront of his person, and the parts most dear to her of old; these she embalmed in sweet-scented myrrh, with musk and other aromatic

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powders, & then enclosed them in a box of gilt silver, which she guarded always as a most precious treasure. One can imagine how she would open it from time to time and sigh over the memory of joys past. I cannot say if the story is true; I heard it told to the King, who passed it on to several of his intimate friends.

¶ One who lost his life in the massacre of Saint Bartholomew was the Lord of Pleuvian, who had fought bravely in the Tuscan war under M. de Soubise, as well as in the Civil war; in the battle of *Jarnac*, where he was in command of a regiment, his bravery was conspicuous, and again at the siege of *Niort*. A few hours after, the soldier who had killed him said to his weeping widow, who was both rich and beautiful, that unless she married him he would kill her and send her after her husband; for in that festival of blood all was decided by the knife. The poor woman, to save her young life, was forced to celebrate a wedding and a funeral together; nor can it be imputed to her for sin, for weak and defenceless as she was, to refuse had been to throw herself on the sword of the murderer, and so be guilty of a worse sin. Such a desperate escape, such a mad waste of life, might be considered virtue in ancient times; but—

‘Those times are past, fair shepherdess!’

Suicide is now forbidden by our holy Christianity, and widows are thus provided with a convenient excuse; often they declare that were it not forbidden by God they would kill themselves for grief; and this sad necessity of living they make their mask to the dance of love.

¶ “In this same massacre was widowed a woman of a good house, and of person very attractive; & while still warm (as it were) from the embraces of her husband, she was forced by a gentleman whose name I know. With the horror of this she became so distracted and wild, that for some time she was thought to be out of her senses. But she soon recovered, & steering for widowhood’s brighter shore, she entered into the pleasures of the world with a good heart; till forgetting altogether her shame, she married happily and well; for which I at least admire her.

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¶ Here is another story of a woman widowed in the feast of Saint Bartholomew. So bitter was her grief for her husband that if she saw any poor Catholic after, though he had taken no part in the massacre, she shuddered in horror as if he had been the plague itself, and sometimes fainted with the violence of her feelings. Of entering *Paris*, even of seeing it within a distance of two leagues, she would not so much as hear; her eyes could not have borne the sight nor her mind the thought. But at the end of two years she melted, and came to *Paris* to salute the good town, to drive up and down its streets and visit the Palace in her coach; only she avoided the Rue de la Huchette where her husband had been killed, she would pass through fire and water than through this street. In this she was like the serpent described by Pliny, which so hates the ash-tree that rather than seek its shade it will be roasted to death by the sun. There is no doubt that grief still gnawed at her heart; in fact the King, when heir-apparent in his brother's reign, used to say that he had never seen a woman so haggard with grief; and that we should have to call down this hawk and hood it, as we do with haggard birds on account of their wildness. But a little time later he was saying that she seemed to have grown tame, for she would come down of herself to be hooded, even to be covered in good earnest! From that on she had eyes for no place but *Paris*, she gave her heart to it altogether, walking up and down its streets as if she were mapping the town, and had to measure it in every direction; this was the only duty now she recognized, all her vows of hatred were forgotten.

And what was the sight that met my eyes on my return to Court after an absence of eight months? I had no sooner made my bow to the King than I saw our widow sail into the presence-chamber of the Louvre, accompanied by friends and relations, and in all the glory of ceremonial robes and head-dress. She was coming to be solemnly betrothed, that is to say, to receive the first order of matrimony at the hands of the Bishop of Digne, grand almoner to the Queen of Navarre; and the rite was to be performed with all splendour in the presence of Kings and Queens. Who was so astounded as I, unless it was she at the presence of me? and

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well she might be, as now you shall hear. She confessed to me afterwards that I was the last person she had hoped to see in that noble congregation; and when my challenging eye caught hers, reminding her but too plainly of the vows and protestations she had made to me, she was ready to sink into the ground. Yes! I had been her lover, and an honourable suitor for her hand in marriage; and it seemed to her that I must have come this day on purpose, she imagined me travelling by forced stages, to hold her to her vows and be a public witness to her treachery. Besides her fears of disgrace I gave her such a pang of conscience that she would have given ten thousand crowns rather than that I had appeared, so she declared to me afterwards.

¶ True fidelity was shewn by a widowed Countess I knew, who though a strong Huguenot, engaged herself to marry a Catholic gentleman. Alas! before the day came on she was seized by a contagious fever then raging in *Paris*, and died of it. When she was in extremities her words shewed how it shamed her, even thus unwillingly, to desert her betrothed: 'Alas!' she cried, 'is it possible in so great a town, where all the sciences flourish, that there is no physician who can cure me? Let there be no question of money, I will give whatever he may ask. Ah! if only Death had waited for our wedding day, then by coming to his church I might have given my betrothed a proof of the love I bear him.' (Sophonisba said the opposite, for she regretted not having drunk the poison before her betrothal.) The Countess, having uttered these words and others to the same effect, turned her face to the wall and died. Wonderful is the flame of love, so to call to mind, even in the Stygian passage to oblivion, not only the pleasant fruits left perforce untasted in the garden, but duties hateful as this one to the Huguenot! But if Huguenot ladies have made this sacrifice, so have Catholics on their side; I have known several to take Huguenot husbands after speaking of their religion as something worse than a hanging-crime; but it would take too long to tell all their stories.

This shews again that widows should not be too sure of themselves, should not shout too much at the beginning; as for the dramas of grief

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act, the thunder-and-lightning scenes with their deluges of tears, to indulge in these is simply to prepare a laugh for their friends, when love shall have forced them to surrender. But if one tell them that it would be better to protest less and do more they answer always: 'A widow has to murder her nature at the beginning, every indignity must be inflicted on it and the methods cannot be too violent. After a time, it is true, that same nature recovers; but the widow has had her turn as an object of interest to society, and another specimen is ready to be studied.' Such humorous talk reminds me of a lady on her death-bed, who heard one of her kinsmen taunting another (in a friendly way) with his insatiable lust; starting to laugh, she said to them, 'You're a pair of fools!' then turned over on the other side, and laughing with her last breath passed away.

¶ A disappointing widow was Vittoria Colonna,³³ daughter of the great Fabrizio Colonna, & relict of the great Marquis of Pescayre, a man peerless in his time. I have read in a little Spanish book that after losing her husband—and what a husband he was the world knows—she abandoned herself so to grief, that neither by reason nor the tenderest sympathies would she be consoled; to all endeavours she only answered, 'For what would you console me? for the death of my husband? you are mistaken, he is not dead, but lives and moves in my soul. Daily and nightly I feel him come to life within me, I feel him stir as a child in the womb and come to birth full-grown.' These were beautiful words; it is a pity that a while after she killed this husband, dismissed him to the gloomy company of the shades beyond Acheron, and married secondly the Abbot of Farfe,³⁴ a man little resembling her great Pescayre. I do not mean that there was disparity of race, for the Abbot was of the noble house of the Ursins, which is at least as ancient as that of Avalos; but the achievements of the two were not to be compared, for Pescayre was a hero crowned with glory. It is true that the Abbot had proved his manhood in the service of King Francis, and was a brave and faithful soldier; but he had only been engaged in light skirmishes, whereas the other had led great armies and won the victory on many a fatal field. It was only to be

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expected that a man brought up to the profession of arms from boyhood, and regularly practised in it, as Pescayre was, should outshine a Churchman, who had only turned to it late in life. At the same time I would not speak contemptuously of such soldiers by conversion, who have broken vows taken to God & his Church & exchanged the book for the sword; no, there have too many great Captains who began in that way.

Cæsar Borgia,⁵⁵ Duke of Valentinois, was he not firstly a Cardinal? yet he was Machiavelli's ideal Captain, and was held up by that venerable preceptor of Princes as the mirror of all those qualities they should most assiduously cultivate. In France we had the Marshal of Foix,⁵⁶ a Churchman first and styled the Protonotary of Foix. The Marshal of Estrozze too had taken Holy Orders, & only exchanged the cassock for the tunic on being disappointed of a red hat. Then there was M. de Salvoison, of whom I have spoken before; he was as worthy to be called great Captain as M. d'Estrozze, who was only his superior in birth, being related to the Queen. He likewise made the Church his profession firstly and wore the long gown; and as a Captain he would have surpassed all had he lived longer. The Marshal of Bellegarde⁵⁷ had worn the square cap of the Law and long was known as the Provost of Ours. M. d'Anguien,⁵⁸ who fell in the battle of Saint Quintin, had been a Bishop; and the Knight of Bon-nivet⁵⁹ likewise. The gallant M. de Matigues⁶⁰ was another who had been a Churchman; indeed if I were to give the whole list, this volume would not contain it. Now I will mention one of my own people, but it will be admitted that I have good reason. My brother Captain Bourdeille,⁶¹ once Rodomont of *Piedmont*, was first dedicated to the Church; but finding that he had mistaken his vocation, changed the long coat for a short, and in his first campaign proved himself one of the best Captains and fighting-men in *Piedmont*. He would have been great and famous now, but alas! he died at the age of twenty-five.

¶ In our present King's Court there have been plenty of examples, notably the little Lord of Clermont-Tallard,⁶² whom I knew as Abbot of Bon-Port; after leaving the Abbey he was distinguished both in the field

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and at Court for his bravery, especially when he fell gloriously in our attack on *La Rochelle*, leading the first line into the fosse. I could name a hundred if I had space! M. de Souillelas, known as the young Orlaison,⁶¹ had been Bishop of Riays, and afterwards commanded a regiment; he served the King bravely and faithfully in *Guienne*, under the Marshal of Matignon. No, I must refrain, not only for lack of space, but for fear of my book being called a series of digressions! Yet this is all relevant to the story of Vittoria Colonna, who married a fighting Abbot. Had she not taken this second husband she would better have justified her name of Vittoria, by getting the victory over herself; for which she ought to have striven, seeing she could never find a husband equal to the first.

¶ I have known many ladies who followed this precedent; there was one who married an uncle of mine,⁶² one of the most valiant & perfect knights of his time. After his death she married a man who resembled him about as much as a donkey resembles a Spanish steed. I knew another who married firstly a Marshal of France,⁶³ a handsome and gallant gentleman; and as a second husband took a man his very opposite, an unfrocked priest among other things. What makes her more contemptible is that after marrying him she dared not face the Court for twenty years; and when she returned on his death she took the name & style of her first husband. This is an offence of which Parliament ought to take notice, for it is all too common. It is a gross insult to the second husband when his wife refuses to bear his name after death; what she voluntarily accepted she ought to be obliged to stick to.

¶ I knew a widow who for a year after her husband's death was so prostrate with grief that every day it was thought she must die & the curtain come down; but at the year's end, when it was time for her to go into half-mourning, she said to one of her women, 'Put away this crêpe carefully, I might need it another time.' Immediately she corrected herself, perhaps with a wink at the woman: 'What am I saying? Rather death than second marriage!' When she was out of mourning altogether, sure enough she married again, and the husband she took was very inferior to

the first; though she made the usual defence that he was as well-born. Agreed, my lady; but what of virtue & valour, are not these what count the most? The only satisfactory thing in such cases is that the widow, after landing her man, has little joy of him; for God puts him up to ill-treat her and beat her till she is all repentance—when it is too late!

¶ Ladies who re-marry thus have some whimsical notion in their heads that is perhaps beyond our comprehension. For example, I heard of a Spanish widow who on engaging herself to a second man was asked by her friends what would become of the love that was between her and her first, and she answered: '*La muerte del marido y nuevo casamiento no han de romper el amor d'una casta muger*; the loss of one husband and the taking of another are no interruption to a love that is loyal to marriage.' Well, there may be something in that, but I prefer the answer of another Spanish widow, who was being urged on the contrary to re-marry: '*Si hallo un marido bueno, no quiero tener el temor de perder lo; y si malo, que necesidad he del?*—If I receive a proposal from a good man I am unwilling to have the fear of losing him, and if from a bad, what reason is there for taking him?'

¶ When Valeria the Roman lost her husband, and her friends were offering her consolation, she said to them, 'He is dead for you without doubt, but within me he lives eternally.' It must have been from her that the Marchioness I spoke of borrowed the idea. How different from the sayings of these noble ladies was that of a malicious Spaniard, *que la jornada de la biudez d'una muger es d'un dia*, that the duration of widowhood is but a day! But I can tell you of a lady that spoke just as heartlessly, namely Madame de Monnains, whose husband was the King's⁶⁶ representative in *Bordeaux*, where he was massacred in a riot over the salt-tax. When the news was brought to her and they were giving the terrible details, she only cried, 'Hey! my diamond, what has become of it?' She had given him one of great value in an engagement-ring, which he always wore; and from her words it was easy to know which she felt the more keenly, the loss of her husband or of her diamond.

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¶ Madame d'Estampes, chief favourite of King Francis and little loved by her husband on that account, was once begged by a widow for help in her pitiable condition; 'Ha! my dear,' she answered, 'you don't know when you're well off, there are many would be widows & cannot!' Evidently it was what she desired herself; & there are many wives like her, though happily more are not.

¶ But what shall we say of widows who marry again secretly, and keep from the world all knowledge of their second husbands? I knew one such,⁶⁷ who kept her husband like a book in the press some seven or eight years, without ever publishing him; it was said afterwards that she was afraid of her son by the first husband, who was very ready with the sword, & might have felt called on to avenge the slight on his father. The second husband was a strong man, but this son would have played the devil with him, and might have given his mother a bad time too; it was only when he fell fighting gloriously in the war, that she ventured to issue her book from the press. I knew another case some fifteen years ago, the widow being a great lady who married secretly a Prince, and it was long before the world knew anything of it; then it was said that the second husband had been afraid of the mother of the first, a very masterful lady, who was jealous of the interests of her grand-children. And I knew a widow who married a simple gentleman, lived with him secretly for twenty years, & died without its ever being suspected. Well, well! some strange things go on around us.

¶ I heard a high-born lady once declare, that the late Cardinal du Bellay⁶⁸ actually married, when he was already a Bishop; and that his wife was Madame de Chastillon,⁶⁹ who survived him. She said it in the course of a conversation with M. de Manne,⁷⁰ a Provençal of the House of Senjal; as Bishop of Fréjus he had been private secretary to the said Cardinal, assisting him at the Vatican for fifteen years. He was astounded at the suggestion, and answered that the Cardinal had never spoken to him of such a thing, nor had he heard so much as a rumour of it. 'Well, I am telling you now,' said the lady, 'for it is Gospel truth that he was married

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and that the said Lady of Chastillon was his wife and is now his widow.' I was there myself & heard the conversation; M. de Manne, who is still living, will say whether I lie. I often laugh now when I think of his face of astonishment, for he thought he knew all the secrets of his late master; but in this matter he was *de galico*, as the lawyers say. He was very shocked too, for he was a most conscientious priest; and this was certainly a scandal to the Church, considering the high rank of a Cardinal.

The first husband of Madame de Chastillon, whose title she bore, was said to be the most active guardian of King Charles VIII in his minority; a position he held along with Bourdillon and Galiot and Bonneval, all hereditary guardians of the Blood Royal. He died at *Ferrara* of a wound he received at the siege of *Ravenna*, having been brought thither for a cure. His wife was thus widowed while still young and beautiful & being very demure and seemingly virtuous—though only seemingly, as her marriage with the Cardinal proves—she was appointed lady in waiting to the Queen of Navarre. She is the lady in the Hundred Novels of that Queen, who gave such excellent advice to a Princess in the story, into whose bed a gentleman slipped in the night, by means of some trap-door in the wainscot. He thought to have enjoyment of her body, but only got some pretty scratches in the face; and it was when the Princess was for complaining to the King her brother, that she received the excellent advice dissuading her, which may be read in the Novel. Scandal above all was to be avoided; and the lady's words to this effect could not have been wiser or better framed had she been the Speaker of the House of Parliament himself. This shews that Madame de Chastillon, demure as she was in manner, was up to all the little turns and tricks required of an actress in Love's comedy; so it is the less surprising that she kept so well the secret of her marriage with the Cardinal.

After her death my grandmother, the Senechal's wife of Poitou, got her place with the Queen of Navarre; she was appointed by King Francis himself, who sent to fetch her from her house. With his own hand he presented her to the Queen his sister, as a lady known to him for virtue

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and propriety; indeed he used to call her his 'knight without reproach.' She had none of the aptitude for intrigue of her predecessor, nor did she ever take a second husband. From her I learned that the Princess in the story was the authoress herself, and if you want to know who the gentleman was, she told me that he was Admiral de Bonivet. Myself I do not see what need the Queen had to conceal her identity, since her chastity in this instance was impregnable, and her assailant had to retire in confusion. She herself wished to report the affair to the King, so that it would have become public in this way had not Madame de Chastillon so wisely dissuaded her; and that this was so all may prove by reading the story for themselves. One may suppose that the lady in waiting was thus impregnated with wisdom by her husband the Cardinal, who was one of the wisest and most eloquent men of his day, and himself would have given just such advice. The story of his marriage may seem a little indiscreet in view of the high rank he held in the Church, but if any are scandalised they have only to suppress the name in repeating the story.

¶ If Cardinal du Bellay's marriage was kept so secret, Cardinal de Chastillon" cared not who knew of his; he even trumpeted the fact abroad himself, and to the day of his death he kept both wife and red hat. One excuse he offered was the teaching of the Reformation, to which he adhered strongly; at the same time he would not resign his office in the Church, for it gave him a place in the Councils of Kings, where he could use his great talents for the advancement of the Reformed Religion. I suspect it was much the same with Cardinal du Bellay, for at that time he greatly favoured the doctrines of Luther; even the French Court was infected with them. There was the attraction of novelty, besides the license they gave to all persons in making them their own priests, and to the priests in setting them free to marry.

¶ But let us remember the respect we owe to the Church & tell no more tales of these reverend gentlemen. It is time to put our aged widows through their paces, the hags without six teeth in their chops who yet re-marry. Not long since there was a woman in *Guienne*, already thrice

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widowed, who at the age of eighty took a fourth husband, and he was a gentleman of some rank, too. I cannot think why she did, for she had any amount of money; that of course was the gentleman's reason. She might have rested on her laurels, but it seems she wanted to add to them by lying yet again on the bed of roses; this at least was the comment of Mademoiselle Sevin, a jester to the Queen of Navarre.

¶ Also I knew a great lady who at the age of seventy-six married again, taking a gentleman very inferior in rank to her first husband; she lived to be a hundred, and enjoyed life to the last. In her day she had been a great beauty, & as maid, wife & widow had made the most of her lovely body, so it was said. But what insatiable women! certainly they cannot have lacked heat! That reminds me, I have heard it said by bakers that an old oven heats quicker than a new one, for it keeps its heat and thus makes better bread.

The lovers and husbands of the old women shew a curious taste, yet I have known many gallant gentlemen who were attracted by them, even preferring their beds to those of young beauties. The usual explanation is that the old are more profitable as mistresses, being rich and willing to pay; but I have certainly known some men who loved them ardently, & if they dipped into the old woman's purse it was not the one those cynics mean. Take the case of that King⁷¹ within the memory of some of us, who had such a passion for a widow advanced in years that he left not only his wife but all other young and beautiful women to sleep with her alone. But truly she was one of the most attractive women ever known, so that her lover's choice is not so surprising; her winter was more glorious than the spring or summer of any other.

¶ Those who have visited the courtesans of Italy will tell you that the most in demand are the famous old stagers, for sake of a certain mellowness both in their minds and in their bodies. How well the lovely Cleopatra knew, when she was sent for the first time by Mark Antony, that she need have no misgivings on the score of her maturity! She promised herself that a woman who could allure Julius Cæsar & the great Pompey's

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son Cneus when she was still in her teens and a mere apprentice to love, would have little difficulty now in leading her man by the nose; how should a coarse and simple soldier, as she had heard him described, have wit to see and avoid the toils that she in the ripe subtlety of mind & body would draw around him? Well, the truth of the matter is, some men are best suited by youth in a mistress and others by maturity, with which comes witty and sympathetic conversation, often the most seductive of all charms.

¶ I once heard a gentleman complaining that he had no reason to be out of health as he was, for he had never touched an old woman; and meeting some physicians afterwards, I asked them to explain that maxim of theirs, '*Vetulam non cognovi*, from old women I abstain.' But they only laughed, and among other odds and ends quoted the old proverb, that there is good threshing in an old barn, but old flails are of no use; also the saying that it matters not what age the beast is provided it can carry. They told me of cases they had known in which a lustful old woman had got hold of a young man, and had proved so insatiable that his body was drained of all its vital juices, as the spuit of the grape is distilled away by heat; it seems that the old thus through others supply the lack in their own withered bodies. This at least is how the physicians answered my question? they gave me other reasons besides, but I must leave it to the curious to inquire for themselves.

¶ I myself knew an old widow, a lady of high rank, who in the space of four years sucked dry her third husband and also a young lover; she was the death of them both, not by poison or the knife, but by exhaustion through distillation of the vital liquor. And to see the lady no one would have suspected her to be such a terror, for she assumed most pious airs in company; I even heard that she would not take off her chemise before her women, nor make water while they were in the room. But as a lady of her family remarked, it was only before women she was so squeamish, it was a different story when she got a gallant into her bed-room.

¶ But here is a nice question: is it more defensible in a woman to have

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had three or four husbands, as plenty have had, or to have one husband and one or two lovers, an apparent loyalty and chastity for which many take credit? In answer to this I heard a great lady declare that the only difference she saw was that whereas both had an equal number of men, the lady of many husbands kept within the form of matrimony; in sensuality she considered that there was nothing between them. There is a Spanish proverb which says, *que algunas mugeres son de natura de anguilas en retener, y de lobas en excoger*; that some women are as eels to keep hold of, but in choosing are as wolves; the idea being that the slippery and wriggling eel is hard to hold, and that the bitch wolf will stand for the first dog who smells to her.

¶ Once a lady at Court who had been four times married—I have related this elsewhere, but no matter—told me that she had just been dining with her brother-in-law; ‘and now,’ she said, ‘guess whom I had dinner with!’ She was too simple to see that it was a joke at her own expense, and I could not help laughing a little maliciously as I answered, ‘Do you take me for a diviner? you have had four husbands, and the devil knows how many brothers-in-law you may have!’ She pouted and said, ‘You are spiteful! such-and-such a person was the brother-in-law.’—‘Now you have told me something,’ I said, ‘which is more than you did before!’

¶ There was in *Rome* long ago a lady who had had twenty-two husbands and there was a man who had had twenty-one wives; so the two decided to marry, and to match themselves one against the other as two great champions. It was the husband who survived, and the people of *Rome* swarmed to congratulate him; he was driven in triumph through the streets, with a laurel crown on his head and a palm in his hand;⁷³ a strange triumph certainly!

¶ The Lord of Barbezan in the time of King Henry II, a gentleman known as Saint-Amant, had three wives in succession. The third, who was a daughter of Madame de Mouchy, governess to Madame de Lorraine, proved a better soldier than the previous two, for she survived their conqueror; Saint-Amant died under her hand! Yet she took her loss

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badly, appearing to be utterly disconsolate; so that one day at Court M. de Montpesat, who had a pretty wit always, went up to her and told her that instead of lamenting she ought to be glorying in her victory. The husband she had survived, he said, was a terror of vigorous manhood, who had been the death of his two previous wives; and all the Court was admiring her for having come victorious out of a combat with such a redoubtable champion. Well, that is one sort of glory!

¶ I heard a French Lord go further than the lady quoted above & say that a woman who took three or four husbands was no better than a whore who was kept by three or four lovers successively; the only difference being that one coloured the fact by marriage. In the same way it was remarked by a certain wit, when a gallant gentleman married a lady who had already had three husbands, that he had married a whore from the brothel of respectability. Faith! I declare, those women who have never done marrying are like avaricious surgeons, who keep open the wounds of a poor soldier, that by delaying the cure they may pocket more fees. On the other hand there is a saying, that one should not stop when in full flight, but should finish out the course.

It is a wonder to me that these women, who are so hot to re-marry at once, when they are such elderly Susannahs,⁷¹ do not for their honour's sake use some refrigerative remedy, some cooling potion to restore the temper of their blood; but so far from using such, they stoke the furnace all they can, saying that potions would upset their stomachs. I have read a little old book in Italian which professes to give recipes against lust; there are thirty-two of them, but they are so stupid that I cannot recommend them, ladies would only be afflicting their bodies uselessly; that is my reason for not transcribing them here. Pliny mentions one used by the Vestals in ancient Rome, as well as by Athenian ladies during the feast of Demeter, Thesmophoria or the giving of laws; throughout the period of this feast they had to keep themselves chaste, & in order to chill their blood and banish all amorous desire, they slept on mattresses stuffed with leaves of a tree called *agnus castus*, or the chaste lamb. Aha! they may

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have chastened themselves in this way during the feast, but afterwards, I'll engage, they threw the mattress and its stuffing to the winds!

I saw one of these trees in a garden in *Guienne*, belonging to a high-born lady of great beauty, who used to shew it to visitors as a curiosity, telling them its peculiar virtue; but Devil take me if I ever saw a lady pick a branch of it, or take needle and thread to make a mattress! There was no excuse for the owner at least, who could do with her tree whatever she pleased; but it would hardly have pleased her husband had she done so! While she was so beautiful, he would rather she left her body to nature to regulate, especially as she had given him a number of good children. ¶ Common-sense tells us that these kill-joy remedies should only be ordered for poor nuns, who are often assailed by temptations of the flesh, ply the scourge and fast as they may. Many of them at least, if they had their liberty again, would refresh themselves at the wells of the world; yes, poor dears, they often repent of their repentance. This reminds me of a pleasant story of a Roman courtesan who repented & took the veil. The day she was to enter the convent an old lover of hers, a French gentleman by the way, came to her house to take a last farewell of her; and before leaving he begged her to lie down for him, to which she consented but said to him, '*Fate dunque presto, ch' adesso mi verrana cercar per far mi monaco e menare al monasterio*; be quick about it then, for they are on their way hither, to take me to the convent and make a nun of me.' She wanted to have just one last & thought to herself no doubt, '*Tandem haec olim meminisse juvabit*, some day it will be a pleasure to remember this.' But it was a strange repentance, & a strange baptism for a nun! I expect, once they are behind the walls, they live more on regrets for the world than on any food material or spiritual; I mean the young and beautiful, or many of them at any rate. And there are many who know how to find a remedy, and grant dispensations to themselves, if they cannot obtain them from their superiors by any device; for nuns are not punished nowadays as in ancient *Rome*, where the Vestals were treated as you perhaps know for a single slip. Ah! that was abominable cruelty; but they were

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ignorant pagans who did it, and their minds were full of horrors. We Christians, who have the beautiful example of Christ before us, ought to be charitable as He was, and forgive as we hope to be forgiven. I should describe here the punishment of the Vestals; but ere I could write it, the ink in my pen would freeze with horror.

¶ Well, let us leave these poor prisoners, who once the convent gate has clanged behind them suffer torments enough, I swear. And so thought the Spanish lady who exclaimed, as she saw a beautiful young woman being led to the Heavenly marriage, '*O tristezilla, y en que pecasteis, que tau presto vienes a penitencia, y seys metida en sepultura viva!* Alas, poor wretch! what deadly sin have you committed, that you come so early to this life of penitence, this living death?' Seeing then how the new nun was welcomed by the sisterhood, and what queenly honours they paid to her, the lady said between her teeth, *que toda le hedia, hasta el encienso de la yglesia*, that the whole performance stank in her nostrils, even the holy incense.

This sacrifice of virgins was restricted by a good law of Heliogabalus, which forbade the imposition of Vestal vows on any Roman virgin involuntarily; for he said that women had too little control of their sexual impulses to perform vows for which they had no vocation. On this account he commended those charitable persons who founded hospitals for the bringing up of daughters of the poor with a view to marriage; for these acted as a check on vice, by opening the way to a lawful enjoyment of nature's fruit. So Panurge, in Rabelais, spent much of his money on getting women married; the most costly being the old and ugly, who needed so much more dowry than the young beauties.

¶ One question there is which I should like answered in all truth & honesty by those who have had the experience, namely, what are a woman's feelings toward the memory of a first husband when she has taken a second? There is a saying as to this that later loves and hates blot out the memory of earlier; or as it is sometimes put, that a second marriage is the grave of the first. This reminds me of an amusing story, though it is

one of low life; but it need not be despised on that account, rather it may be welcomed as shewing how wisdom often lurks in humble obscurity. A great lady of *Poitou* once asked a peasant woman, a tenant of hers, how many husbands she had had and how she felt about them; to which the peasant, bobbing a curtsy, answered coolly, 'I'll tell you, Madam; I have had two husbands, thank God. The first was called William, and the second Collas. William was a good, easy-going man, & treated me well; but Collas, God forgive him, was the man to do the business in bed.' Only she said flat out a certain word, not troubling to talk round it as I have. But I ask you to notice how this old rogue put up a prayer for the soul of her gamesome lad, commending him to Heaven on such an account! while for the worthy first husband she asked no grace, nor ever mentioned him in that quarter. Ha! I suspect there are many more women like her, who only take second husbands for that purpose; and then it is the best performer who is remembered most kindly. They promise themselves that the second is going to be a fury, but often they are disappointed and do not find in the shop the goods they counted on. The man may be good otherwise, but his game-cock is a poor fighter, a lean & limp thing, worn and wasted, whose backer repents the day she put her money on it; many such cases have I known, but have not space left to quote them.

¶ We read in Plutarch how Cleomenes married the beautiful Agiatis, widow of Agis, whom he came to love very dearly for her wonderful beauty. He knew that she always sorrowed in her heart for her first husband, but such was his love that he could sympathize with her tender memories; often he turned the conversation on to the other, his rival, and asked her kindly questions about his character and their pleasure in one another. His grief was profound when Death took her, after she had been his but a short while. Nor is he the only husband who has so truly loved a beautiful widow.

¶ It is near time for me to make an end, or I shall be going on for ever; I will only say a word now on the other side of this matter. There are many ladies who love their second husbands much better than their first, and

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often they have explained it to me thus: 'Whereas my first marriage was arranged for me by Kings and Queens, and I was pressed into it by parents who never consulted my feelings, once a widow I was free to choose whom I would, & so having married for love am much happier with my second husband.' This certainly sounds reasonable, but unfortunately it is a fact, as the old proverb says, that rings which love puts on are often taken off with the knife; every day we see cases of women who expected to be happy with some ne'er-do-weel, picked up at the gate of prison or brothel, rescued from the gutter and made lord of their all, who in return only beats and insults them, often taking their life in the end. When the same women were being treated only too well by their first husbands they could say nothing bad enough of those; and what follows I believe to be a judgment from Heaven on their ingratitude.

¶ Very different was a widow I heard of, who on the first night of her second marriage, when her husband entered on the act of pleasure, began to sob & to sigh so inappropriately it seemed as if winter had been mixed with summer; whereon her husband asked the cause of her grief, was it that he had disappointed her as a lover? She answered, 'Alas, Sir! you acquit yourself only too well; you remind me of my first husband, who begged me so earnestly never to marry again, but in memory of him to devote myself to his children. Woe is me! the more pleasure you give me you will only smite my conscience the more. Oh! what shall I do? If he can see me from the place where now he is, I know he is cursing me heartily.' But the new husband guessed where the memory of his predecessor was most alive, and there drove such a good nail that before morning he made a coffin of that residence; & when he rose & opened the window of their bed-room the ghost of the late husband flew out, never to return. Hence the old proverb that a husband buried cannot bury the next; and that other which says a widow moping is a wife hoping.

¶ I knew another widow of a very different complexion, who did anything but weep in the embraces of her second husband; for on the first night she entered so heartily into the game that between them they broke

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down the bedstead. She was suffering too from a cancer in one of her breasts, but this did not deter her from any pleasure known to lovers; and in the intervals of rest she entertained the second husband with accounts of the dulness & feebleness of the first. I have heard it said on the other hand, that what a second husband most hates and detests is a glowing account of the virtues of the first; it arouses as much jealousy in him as if the dear departed had returned to claim the wife! Let her abuse and mock the dead as much as she like, of this the other will never tire! Still there are some men, like Cleomenes, so good-natured as to take an interest in a former husband. I fancy that in these cases the second husband must be confident of his own superiority, & that it is in a patronizing way he asks about the power of the other to give pleasure; certainly many women encourage this belief, as it puts a man on his mettle to be told that another was but an apprentice compared to him. On the other hand it may make him self-satisfied, so some women take the opposite line, and tell their men what wonders the others did; thus pricked they become as lively as an ass unsaddled and turned loose.

¶ Such widows need not fear the laws of Chios! In that most beautiful island of the *Ægean*, formerly a Genoese possession but for the last thirty-five years occupied by the Turks—and a sad loss to Christendom it is—I have heard from merchants that if a woman continues in widowhood, she is obliged by the Government to pay a tax called *argomoniatiquo*; a word which means (with all respect to the ladies) that idle thighs are useless. In ancient Sparta on the other hand, according to Plutarch's life of Lysander, a penalty was imposed on men who did not marry, or who made a bad match. I once asked a man from the isle of Chios what was the purpose of their law, & he told me it was to guard against depopulation of the island. Well, there is no fear of our France becoming a desert, through widows not re-marrying; I suppose there are fewer 'idle thighs' in this country than in any, so we need not think of introducing an *argomoniatiquo*. For even when our women do not marry, they find men to dig and water their gardens, so that they bring forth fruit in due season.

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Indeed it is lucky for them that another Chian law is not in force here, the one ordering that any woman, whether in town or country, who loses her maidenhead without being married and so enters on that career, shall pay a fine of one ducat to the captain of the night watch; having done so she is entitled to his protection, whenever she shall be plying her joyous trade. It seems a cheap insurance for a whole life-time, yet it is the richest and most certain sort of income to that obliging officer. Which shews that in this island the women to-day are very different from what they were in old days, when they were so chaste, as Plutarch tells us in his *Opuscula*, that for seven centuries there was no record of an adulterous wife, or of a maiden deflowered out of wedlock. 'A miracle!' cries my lady, 'or a Homeric myth!' Well, the Chians have changed all that to-day.

¶ There never was a time but the Greeks had some new notion, tending to voluptuous practices. We read that in the isle of Cyprus there was a custom, said to have been introduced by Madame Venus herself, as patron saint of that island; by which unmarried girls used to go and walk up and down the coast, to make their dowries by means of harlotry with passing sailors. Many ships would touch at the island for the purpose, leaving their compass-course to seek that blissful shore; then having refreshed themselves at the wells of love, the sailors would cheerfully empty their purses into the laps of those beauties, whom it was so bitter to leave and face again the inhospitable sea. Thus the maids of Cyprus got their dowries, some much and some little, some soon and some late, according to their degree of beauty, or it might be their skill in seduction.

To-day none of the daughters of our Christian nations go and expose themselves so to the winds of the sea, to the frosts of winter & the fury of a summer's sun, in order to earn their dowries; no, the hardships would be too much for their tender flesh, their white & delicate skins; so they receive their lovers in rich pavilions, lying between gorgeous bed-curtains, and there they draw the wages of love, without any labour on their part. I am not speaking of the Roman courtesans, who earn all they get, but of certain great ladies. Well, their parents and brothers are saved from

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the necessity of raising money to provide dowries for their marriage; indeed it is often the daughters who provide for their families, and what is more, get them advancement in their professions or in society; I have seen many instances of this.

¶ It was one of Lycurgus' laws that virgins should be married without dowry, so that the men might have no avaricious motive but take them only for their virtue. But what was understood by virtue then? that virgins at solemn festivals should appear naked, and thus sing and dance publicly with the young men, even wrestle with them in the marketplace. This was done in all virtue and purity, says the history; but what we should like to know is where the virtue lay in this exhibition of naked virgins. Pleasure for the spectators there was, if you like, but no virtue; pleasure in the movements of their bodies in the dance, and even more in the wrestling bout. Think of them falling one on top of the other, as it says in the Latin text, *illa sub ille super, ille sub illa super*, she beneath and he above, he beneath and she above. Eh! you cannot persuade me that these daughters of Sparta were such angels of purity; I believe there is no chastity which cannot be shaken, and that after going through the sham combats in public they met again under cover of night to wrestle without rules or umpire.

And it is likely that this was recognized, seeing that Lycurgus made it legal for goodly young men to borrow the wives of others, and as in a fertile soil to plough & to sow; nor was it considered any reproach to an old man thus to lend his wife, provided the young gallant was one of his own choice. If the wife chose, it must be the nearest kinsman of the husband; with him she could couple if she pleased, for the children would be at least of the husband's race and blood. We find the same idea in the Jewish law, which made it the duty of a man to marry his brother's widow in order to 'raise up seed to his brother;' but in our Christian law this is forbidden, although Saint Peter (through his successors) has granted dispensations on certain grounds. In Spain it is often done, though never without Papal dispensation.

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¶ There is one other class of widows which I will speak of as shortly as possible, and then the end; I mean those who shun marriage as an evil in itself, apart from any duty to a deceased husband. I was speaking to one such, a lady of good family and very witty, & I asked her if she intended to make her vow once more to the god Hymen; she answered, 'My friend, suppose a galley-slave, after being chained long years to the oar, had recovered his liberty, would he not be a fool and an imbecile to volunteer for more service under a tyrannical corsair instead of going off & enjoying himself at last? Such is my case, I have been enslaved to a husband & now am free; what should I not deserve were I to take another, especially as I can have all the same pleasure without any risk?' Once I put the same question to another great lady, one of my family, please note, as I would not appear more of a Turk than I need, with all the ladies I have to mention; well, when I asked this lady if she intended to marry again she answered, 'Not to marry, cousin, but to take a trip into the country perhaps;' enough to say that she was going to have a good time without the help of a husband. You remember the proverb, 'safer a plunge into love than into marriage;' and the other which says that women are good hostesses everywhere. I like that last, for as queens they receive bows everywhere; at least the pretty ones do.

¶ I heard tell of another widow whom a gentleman desired as a mistress; he began by asking her, just to feel his way, if she ever felt a wish to be married again; and she answered, 'Do not speak to me of a husband, I could never endure another; a lover would be a different matter, I cannot say as to that.' Then the gentleman, 'Allow me, Madam, to be that lover, if I may not be a husband.'—'Persevere in devotion, perhaps you will be,' she said.

¶ There was a fair and honest widow, some thirty years of age, who wished to have a joke with a certain gentleman, or rather to provoke him to make love. She was just about to mount her horse when she noticed as she picked up the front of her habit that it had caught on something and been torn; so she turned to him with mock indignation and said,

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'Look what you've done, Sir, you have torn my front.'—'I should be very sorry to do that,' said the gentleman, 'or to hurt it at all, it is too sweet and pretty.'—'What do you know about it?' said she, 'you have never seen it.'—'Eh! will you deny,' said he, 'that I saw it often when you were a little girl and I used to pull up your clothes as often as I liked?'—'Ah!' said the lady, 'it was only a beardless youngster then and knew nothing of the world; now that it has grown a beard you would not recognize it.'—'Still, I suppose,' said he, 'it is in the same place; I think I could find my way to it.'—'Yes,' said she, 'it is in the same place, though my husband rolled it about more than Diogenes his tub.'—'Ah!' said the gentleman, 'how does it get on now, without ever being stirred?'—'The same as a clock that is never wound,' said she.—'Take care,' said he, 'that the same does not happen to you as to clocks that are not wound, whose springs rust in time, and they are good for nothing after.'—'You press the comparison too far,' said the lady, 'the springs of this clock are not liable to rust, but will always be good when the time comes to wind it.'—'God grant,' said he, 'when that time comes, that I may be the clock-maker whose key will be used!'—'When that festive day comes,' said she, 'we two shall not be idle, but shall work full hours. And may God make a saint of no man I love as well as you!' So ended this passage of wit, so heart-stirring to the gentleman; and the lady, having kissed him fondly, mounted her horse. Her parting words were, 'Goodbye till our next meeting & the feast of love!' But misfortune followed, for the lady died within six weeks, & such was his grief that her lover was near dying also; for those bantering words, with others he had heard from her before, gave him sure hope of winning her, as indeed he had won her heart already. Cursed be the evil fate which took her, say I, for she was one of the loveliest and best women that ever were, and well worth a venal sin, aye, and a mortal!

¶ Another beautiful young widow was asked by a gentleman, if she was keeping Lent & eating no meat according to rule; & she answered that she was keeping Lent strictly. 'Yet I have known you,' said the gentleman,

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‘when you had no scruple about eating both cooked flesh and raw in this season.’—‘That was in my husband’s life-time,’ said she, ‘now that I am a widow I have reformed, and keep all the rules of the Church.’—‘Take care,’ said he, ‘not to overdo your fasting, or you may find when your appetite returns, that the bowels are shrunk and the passage of food difficult.’—‘I know what part of me you refer to,’ said she, ‘and can tell you it is in no way shrunk from its fast; when my appetite returns, I shall be able to give it all reasonable satisfaction.’

¶ There was a great lady whom I knew as maid and wife, & throughout that time her figure was so ample, that no one ever spoke of her without some joke on her stoutness. But when she came to lose her husband, her grief was so extreme, that she dried up & shrank as a fallen branch. For all that she would not be deprived of the joys of love, even employing one of her secretaries to that end, and some said also her cook; yet she could not recover her plumpness, though she might have borrowed from the fat and greasy cook, one would think. She tried her lackeys one after another, having neither pride nor shame in the matter; and all the time she gave herself most prudish airs at Court, had always some moral sentiment on her tongue, and found some scandal to tell of every other lady. She was like the great lady of Dauphiné in the Hundred Novels, who was found lying with her groom or muleteer in a meadow; he was fairly on top of her, when a gentleman came on them who was desperately in love with the lady; but after this sight he made a quick recovery from his heart-ache. I heard of a lady in *Naples* who had a similar passion for her groom; she was very beautiful & he the most hideous of Moors, but his lust and endurance were extraordinary, and for this it was said that she loved him.

¶ I have read in an old black-letter romance, how John of Saintré was brought up as a page to King John. In those days it was the custom as now that pages should carry messages for the great persons they served; only then they went always on horseback. I have even heard people of my grandfather’s generation say that pages were oftensent on minor affairs of

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state, to save the expenses of an ambassador; for there was nothing to do but to set the boy on a horse, and give him a small purse for the journey. So little John of Saintr , as he was long called, being a special favourite of King John for his lively wit, was often given messages to the King's sister, who was then a widow, though the book does not say of whom. And this lady fell in love with the page after one or two visits. One day finding him alone and in a convenient place, she entered into conversation with him; among other things she asked him if he loved any lady at her brother's Court & which he thought the most beautiful. It is a common opening with ladies, when they wish to draw a man on to make love; I have been the object of such an attack myself. Our little John, who had never so much as given a thought to love, replied, 'Not yet, Madam;' but he was induced to give a description of several ladies and to say what he liked in them. Then she went on to sing the praises of love, and to enumerate its virtues; but when she asked him was he not ambitious now to be a lover, he answered, 'Less than ever, Madam!' But she would not be discouraged for ladies in those old times were driven by love the same as to-day; only the world then was less skilled in counterfeiting. If a woman happened to be clever, so much the better for her, as it was only such who could put on the innocent airs, which deceive husbands. The lady in our story had less need, being a widow; & seeing that this boy was one to be prized she tried a new approach, saying that she would give him a most loving mistress, if he would be a faithful cavalier; above all she said he must swear to keep it secret, and threatened him with awful pains and penalties should he fail in this. Then at last she declared herself, and offered to be his lady-love; for the word mistress was not yet in use. The page could hardly believe his ears, & supposed that she must be making fun of him, or else that she wished to trap him into some liberty for which he would be whipped. But she shewed then such signs of amorous fire, caressed him with such ardent fondness, that boy as he was, he knew this was no pretence. All the time she was telling him that she wished to train him up herself, and she would make a great man of him. Well, to cut a long

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story short, they became lovers, & long continued so, even after the page had become a man of the world; it was only when he had to depart on a distant journey that the lady exchanged him for a great fat Abbot. This story is repeated in *Novels of the Adventurous World*, by a gentleman-in-waiting to the Queen of Navarre; there it is added that the Abbot put an affront on the brave John of Saintré when he returned, & that he was well paid out for it soon after. The original source of this charming story is the old romance I spoke of.

So you see, love of ladies for pages is no modern innovation; boys have always had their attraction, even when freckled like partridges. But what an odd ambition it is in ladies to wish for numbers of lovers but never a husband! It must be that liberty above all is sweet to them; they think they are in Paradise so long as they avoid a husband's domination. For they have their dowry in their own hands, they manage their houses as they like and answer to no one for their expenditure; every question is brought to them for decision, in short they are mistresses instead of servants. Above all they choose their own pleasures, and what persons shall administer to them.

It is true that some widows are anxious to re-marry, for sake of the rank & the dignity, as well as the riches & the luxury they may acquire thereby; and to this end they live virtuously. On the other hand, I have known great ladies and Princesses who would not re-marry for fear of losing their present grandeur, if they should take a husband inferior to the first; but this did not deter them from taking lovers & living joyously, for they could hold receptions in their bed-rooms like very Queens, and so lost nothing of the honours and attentions paid to rank. And are not such persons to be envied, who at the same time can enjoy the glories of the heights and dive into the pleasurable deeps? But I warn you not to mention the same to the ladies, thinking to please them by your congratulations; if you so much as allude to their double lives, you will bring on yourself a torrent of indignant denials, with revenges probably to follow. ¶ I have heard tell of a widow, indeed I knew her myself, who was long

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the mistress of a certain gentleman, on the understanding that he was going to marry her; but he never came up to the scratch. One day the poor lady received a reprimand from the Princess she served, & deceived and betrayed as she was, she answered, 'What, Madame! is an honourable love forbidden? that would be too great severity!' I fear, this love called honourable had more of lechery in it, its substance being compounded of spermatic fluid. But God knows, the same could be said of most loves; they may be pure and honourable at the start, but like virgins they are deflowered in practise, & their character is transmuted as by a philosopher's stone into something most lascivious and little honourable.

¶ Once the late M. de Bussy, who was the wittiest man of his time and a delightful story-teller, exclaimed on seeing a widow at Court, who was always carrying on with some man: 'What! does this mare still go to the stallion?' The saying was reported to the lady, who became his mortal enemy; but when M. de Bussy heard so, he shewed little concern; 'Never mind,' he said, 'I know how to make my peace with her. Tell her I did not say that exactly, but what I said was, 'Does this filly go already to the stallion?' For I know very well, she is not vexed at being called a light-o'-love, but at the suggestion that she is old; and when she hears that it was a filly I called her, she will think that I take her for a young woman.' And sure enough, when the lady was given this version of the story, she was quite satisfied and made it up with M. de Bussy; at which we had a hearty laugh. Whatever she might do, she was always looked on as an old patched up mare, who superannuated as she was, still whinnied to horses.

¶ She would have done better to follow the example of another lady I heard of, who in her prime was as gay as any, but so soon as she felt old age creeping on, devoted herself to serving God by fast & prayer. When a gentleman remonstrated with her on her night watches in Church and her fasting at table, and asked her if she was thus mortifying the flesh in order to banish desire, she answered, 'Desire? alas! it has left me long ago!' Her tone was as tragic as was Milo's, that mighty wrestler of *Croton*, on

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an occasion that I seem to remember describing elsewhere; one day in his old age he had gone down into the arena merely to look on at a bout, when one of the team asked him if he would not give an exhibition of his famous powers. Rolling up his sleeves and bracing his muscles, Milo looked tragically at his arms, and all he said was, 'Alas! they are dead.' To make the simile complete, this lady ought to have pulled up her petticoats.'

¶ I heard a witticism once which was much after the style of M. de Bus-sy's. A gentleman had returned to Court after an absence of six months, and he saw a lady going to the academy, which was established by the late King; 'What!' said he, 'is that academy still going on? I heard that it was closed.' The answer he got was amusing. 'It had to be kept open for that lady,' said someone; 'her professor is teaching her the science of perpetual motion!' True enough, the philosophers may rack their brains over perpetual motion, but it is only in the school of Venus that the practise of it is taught. A certain lady of fashion gave an even better answer when another's beauty was being praised to her; the only fault mentioned was that her eyes were fixed in an immovable stare, and the comment of the listener on this was: 'No doubt she puts so much movement into the rest of her body, especially the midmost parts, that she has none left for her eyes.'

¶ Ah! but if I were to write down all the witticisms and all the good stories that I have heard on this subject I should not be finished in my life-time. Besides, I have other fish to fry, so by your leave I will bring my Discourse to an end; it may be all summed up in the dictum of Boccaccio, already quoted, that whether maid, wife or widow, the bent of a woman is toward love. I say nothing about women of low class, either of town or country, for only great ladies are my subject and for them my pen is winged. If I am asked to speak more particularly, I have no hesitation in saying that wives are the best quarry for a lover who wants immediate satisfaction, the only thorn on this rose being the danger of a jealous husband; but it is he you have to thank for stoking the furnace,

till it blaze & so demand ever more and more fuel, which it will be your happy privilege to supply. Only beware of the knife, for the cleverest have often walked into the ambush laid by a jealous husband.

¶ In fact you must be bold and cautious at the same time, after the example of the great King Henry, that courteous lover and devotee, so welcomed by the ladies for his known discretion. Whenever he changed his bed and went to keep another appointment, I have heard on the best authority that in his progress through secret passages and up emergency-ladders, such as his castles of *Saint-Germain* and *Blous* and *Fontainebleau* were all furnished with, he was always preceded by his favourite valet Griffon, carrying his hunting-spear and a lighted torch; then came the King with a mantle over his night-shirt, the collar of it up round his face and his sword under his arm. Having arrived at the lady's room, he had the spear and the sword placed beside the bed's head; then he locked the door securely, & Griffon lay on the mat outside, sleeping like the fox with one eye open. Now if so great a King took precautions, you can judge for yourself the risk run by any small-fry of his Court who should rashly enter on like adventures; do not imagine the King to have been over-cautious, for the case of Alexander, sovereign Duke of Florence,⁷⁶ shews that even Kings and Princes can be laid by the heels. I know that there are some reckless men who disdain all prudence; but I also know that they very often pay for it.

¶ There is a story of King Francis, that having an affair of long standing with a beautiful lady,⁷⁷ he came one day unexpectedly to her room, it being an unusual hour for the amorous fit to take him; finding the door locked he knocked on it impatiently, as he had a right to do, being established master there apart from his crown. Now the lady had another gentleman there, the Lord of Bonivet, but she did not dare to call out as do the courtesans of *Rome*, '*Non si può, la signora è accompagnata*'; not now, Madam has company; she had to decide where to hide her lover quickly. Luckily it was summer-time and the fire-place was filled with plants in pots, as is the pleasant custom in France; so she advised him to crawl in

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behind them, all in his night-shirt as he was, and be thankful that the weather was warm. When he had hidden himself behind the leaves the lady opened the door to the King, who was soon in bed with her & taking his pleasure. After this the King wanted to make water, and for want of any convenience went over to the fire-place; and so great was his need that he drenched the poor lover as if a bucket of water had been thrown over him. The King doused him from all sides as if it had been a garden hose he held, and the wretch was lucky if none passed his lips. Imagine what an ordeal! what patience he shewed to endure, what fidelity never to move a muscle! The King having finished sauntered over to the bed, where he fondled the lady awhile before leaving the room; then at last she locked the door & called her lover into bed, where she warmed him with the kindly heat of her body, and gave him a clean shirt to put on. So they laughed together over trials past, and over a real danger too, for if the lover had been discovered it would have gone badly with both of them.

Another time the King suspected this lady's love for M. de Bonivet, and to put him off the scent she said casually, 'Well, it is a good joke, the Lord of Bonivet to think himself handsome! I amuse myself by saying how I admire him, & he swallows it all! But though one could not think of him as a lover he is good company, for he keeps one laughing with his jokes and stories.' Thus she convinced the King that her friendship with de Bonivet was quite innocent, & that she was a faithful mistress to himself. Ha! there is many a lady has covered her loves by such a ruse, making the greatest mock of her gallant before the world, telling any slanderous story of him, but more than making up to him for all behind closed doors; this is what is called finessing a lover.

¶ I knew a young lady who was a great beauty, & had a lover with whom her brother had quarrelled, so that she was always in conflict with her family; one day her mother thought to advise her for her own good, and said to her kindly enough, 'Come, my dear, what do you want with a man like that? he has no style about him, and he's positively ugly! why, he's

more like a village pastry-cook than anything else!' At this the girl began to laugh, apparently in agreement with her mother, & to join in making fun of her lover; yes, she said, he would be a perfect village pastry-cook if only he had a red cap! But she had no intention of giving him up, only kept their meetings a secret after this. Perhaps this was too troublesome, for it only lasted six months, and then she exchanged him for another.

When it is a question of making lovers of servants, such as secretaries & lackeys or any man of low rank, I have known ladies who could not say anything bad enough of others on this account, pretending to the world to despise such a taste utterly; & all the time they were themselves worse offenders than any. It is another example of the finesse of ladies, thus publicly to ramp and rage against some vice, which in secret they indulge in freely. There is no end to their devices! as the Spanish proverb truly says, '*Mucho sabe la Zorra, mas sabe mas la dama enamorada*'; the fox is knowing, but not so knowing as a lady in love.'

¶ But clever as the lady was in disarming King Francis when he grew suspicious, I happen to know that she did not altogether clear his mind of the idea. For once when I visited the town of *Chambourg*, I called on an old door-keeper who had been valet to this King, and he received me very respectfully; for he had known my people at Court and in camp, and was very pleased to tell me any gossip of those days. He led me into a room the King had slept in, and shewed me three words written on the wall beside the window; 'Read that, Sir,' he said, 'if you have never seen the writing of the King my master, there is a specimen.' Written in large letters was this sentence, 'Every woman changes.' I had brought with me a very clever friend of mine, M. des Roches, of *Perigord*, and turning to him I said, 'No doubt some of his most trusted mistresses deceived him, & noticing some change in them he suspected that they were paying him in false coin, was sure of it perhaps but had no proof, and so to relieve his feelings wrote this up here.' The old valet overheard me and said, 'Sure they did, Sir! don't make any mistake about that! Of all the ladies he had while I was with him, there was not one but was worse than his

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stag-hounds to follow a false scent; but if they gave tongue it had to be a low whimper, for they would have paid dearly had he heard.' I ask you, what are we to think of women who cannot be content with the lover they have, even when he is so great a King as this? No, they want always change; and the great King Francis had to learn that though he could wrench them from husband or parents or flee widowhood, he could not keep a woman constant to himself.

¶ I heard of a lady⁷⁸ who was loved by her King so ardently that he heaped on her favours and honours of every sort, indeed none was ever treated as she; and all the time she remained in love with a simple Lord,⁷⁹ and refused to give him up. When the gentleman warned her himself that the King would ruin them both, she only answered, 'It is all one, for if you leave me, I will ruin myself to ruin you. Know this, I would rather be called your concubine than mistress of the King.' There was woman's caprice for you, and sensual passion too!

¶ I knew another great lady, a widow this time, who shewed a like disposition; for though she was worshipped by a great nobleman, she refused him rather than give up her following of lovers, from whom she might have a man at all hours and her mortar never be without a pestle. Sometimes she must needs have three at once, having tasks for them that one alone could not perform; but apart from this it is a rule of love that desire cannot be bound to any time, or to any person either singly or in company. There is a lady like this one in the Hundred Novels, who received three lovers at once and contrived very cleverly to gratify them all.

¶ The beautiful Agnes Sorrel, the adored mistress of King Charles VII, was suspected by him of bearing a daughter that was not his, & he could not bring himself to own the child. Our chronicles say that such as the mother had been the daughter grew up. A like case of infidelity was that of Anne Boleyn, second wife of King Henry of England, who had her beheaded for not contenting herself with him; and he had taken her for her beauty and loved her passionately.

¶ A lady I know had a lover for some time, after which they agreed to

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part; when they met again they fell to talking over their past loves. The gentleman, wishing to pose as the gay cavalier, said to her, 'What! do you suppose you were the only mistress I had during that time? Ha! then it will surprise you to learn that I had two others!' The lady answered immediately, 'Perhaps it will surprise you to learn that you were not my only lover, but that I had as many as three others.' Well, a good ship will have two or three anchors, in case of one dragging.

¶ Now for a final toast, may no lady ever lack a lover! for there are three ineffective things, as I read once in the lesson-book of a fair and honest lady, who understood Spanish well enough but was learning to talk it correctly; this little maxim was written out in her own hand, which I knew very well: '*Hembra o dama sin compañero, esperanza sin trabajo y navio sin timon, nunca pueden hazer cosa que sea buena*; a woman without a man, hope without effort and a ship without a rudder, these are three things that can never achieve anything.' It is equally true of maid, wife or widow, for none of them has value but in the company of a man; yet we must not expect to win them easily on that account, for that man is most agreeable to them who has gone through labour or hardship or danger for their sake. Of course the wife and widow are not so difficult as the maid, for as we used to say in the army, it is always easier to conquer an enemy who has been under the yoke already than one who has never known what it is to surrender; or to put it another way, it is easier to travel a road that has been well planned and founded than a mere track on which no engineer has worked; travellers will answer for this comparison, and soldiers for the former. There is no knowing what trouble you may have with a maid; some take it into their heads that they will never marry but live always at home, and if they are asked why they will not marry, their answer is, 'Because I will not.' Observe that all the Olympian goddesses scorned the name of virgin, Cybele was none, nor Juno nor Venus nor Thetis nor Ceres; the only exception was Pallas, who took her birth from the head of Jupiter, as if to shew that virginity is only an opinion conceived in the head. Ask those of our daughters who

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never marry, or if they do marry, put it off till they are elderly Susanahs, ask them what is their objection to marriage, and they will answer, 'It does not suit me to marry, I do not choose to.' And they call that a reasonable opinion.

¶ Some such there were at Court even in the time of King Francis, for example that fair and honest lady known as Poupincourt, a daughter of the Queen-regent; who never married, and at the age of sixty died a virgin as she was born, for she was very virtuous. La Brelandière also died unmarried at the age of eighty; some will remember her as the governess of a young lady, afterwards Madame d'Angoulême. And I knew a lady of very high rank, aged seventy, who had always refused to marry; but this one was no virgin.⁸² At least she had been to bed with men, but it was stated that she was unfit to be a wife because she was not made as other women, having only the smaller opening through which she passed water; on this account she was not only excused, but commended for not marrying. A strange excuse, God knows whether it was true! certainly she had some door to open to men, for she gave good entertainment both to them and to herself.

¶ Mademoiselle de Charansonnet, of Savoy, lately died unmarried at the age of eighty or more; she was buried at *Tours* in the white robe & crown of virginity, with much pomp and ceremony. There can be no question of her lacking offers, for she was as beautiful as virtuous, & I have known her to refuse more than one great personage. My sister of Bourdeille, now a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, has likewise refused many good offers, for she never wished to marry & never will; she is of an obstinate nature, and the fancy she took to live and die a maid has possessed her, till she is now past the age for marrying. Another such lady in the Queen's household is Mademoiselle de Certeau; and we must not forget Mademoiselle de Surgières, the scholar of the Court, who has been dubbed Minerva, and there are too many more to tell.

¶ The Infanta of Portugal, daughter of Queen Eleanour, made the same resolution; & she died unmarried & a virgin at the age of sixty or more.

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It certainly was not that she lacked rank, for she was one of the greatest ladies in the world; and as to wealth, beside what she had in her own country she had great estates in France, which were well managed by General Gourgues. By the hand of nature she had been no less generously endowed; I saw her myself when she was already forty-five, and a more beautiful and charming lady one could not wish to meet. Certainly she deserved a good husband; nor was she difficult of approach, even to us French, but to all alike was sweet & courteous. I know what I am speaking of, for I often had the honour of conversing with her privately.

When the late Grand Prior of Lorraine brought his fleet of galleys from the Levant for the voyage to Scotland, in the time of the minority of King Francis II, he put in at *Lisbon* after passing through the Straits; and remaining there for several days, he visited the Infanta frequently & saw much of her. She received him courteously & took great pleasure in his company, and finally sent him on his way loaded with presents. Among other things she gave him a chain to hang his cross on, a magnificent piece of goldsmith's work, set with diamonds & rubies of great size; it went three times round his neck, and might be worth four or five thousand crowns. Yes, it was certainly worth that, for he could always pawn it for three thousand, as he did once in London when we were on our way back from Scotland; but the instant he arrived in France he sent to get it out of pawn, for he had a great affection for it, having been smitten with love of the Infanta, & valuing it chiefly as her gift. I believe she returned his love in full, and gladly would have loosed the knot of her virginity for him; in marriage I mean, for she was a very chaste and virtuous Princess. I can say further, that but for the Civil War breaking out in France when it did, and his brothers drawing him into it and so keeping him engaged, he would have taken his galleys back to the Mediterranean by way of *Lisbon*, to see his Princess again and make her a proposal of marriage; and I am sure he would not have been shewn the door, for he came of a great line & had King's blood in his veins as she, besides being one of the handsomest, one of the bravest and one of the most charming Princes in all

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Christendom. I saw him one day speaking to his brothers on the subject, for they were the oracles of the family and always gave the course to be steered, especially the two eldest. When he told them of his visit to *Lisbon*, and with what favours he had been received, they were eager for him to call at the port again on his return; even advised him to press his suit though a Cardinal, for the Pope would certainly give a dispensation for the marriage. Only for the cursed rebellion he would have gone, and it is my opinion that the issue would have been to his honour and happiness; for the Princess loved him well, as she took no trouble to conceal from me after his death. This was a great grief to her, and she asked many questions as to the circumstances, shewing such emotion as could only have had one meaning; it is easy in such cases for anyone who has eyes in his head and a little experience to know when Love has knocked at the heart.

¶ I heard another reason given for the unwillingness of girls to marry; it was given by a very clever lady, I will not say whether maid or wife, but she would seem to have had experience. She said it is *propter molliorem*. Now the Latin *mollis* means soft or luxurious, so what the lady wished to convey was, that these girls are such lovers of their own bodies, and have studied so well the arts of giving pleasure to themselves, or it may be to one another in the Lesbian manner, that they cannot believe a rough man capable of giving them as good; so they shrink from the thought of marriage, devoting themselves to the cult of subtle and luxurious sensations.

In ancient *Rome* their virginity would have been greatly honoured, and among other privileges, no court would had power to pass sentence of death on them. In the time of the *Triumvirate* we read of a senator on the proscribed list, who like the rest was to be executed together with his whole family. When a daughter of his appeared on the scaffold, a beautiful girl in her teens and still a virgin, the executioner had to deflower her himself, there on the scaffold, before he could lay the axe to her neck. The Emperor *Tiberius* took delight in having virgins thus publicly deflowered and then put to death; could there be more abominable cruelty?

¶ The Vestals of course had extraordinary honour paid to them, as well for their virginity as for their religion; but if the least spot on their purity was proved, they were punished a hundred times more severely than if they had never been guardians of the sacred flame, for they were walled up alive and left to appalling agonies. It is written of one Albinus that meeting some Vestals on foot in the outskirts of *Rome* he made his wife and children get down from the chariot that he might drive the virgins to their convent. With such sanctity were they invested that often they were chosen as arbiters between the knights and the people, in disputes that arose between them.

The Emperor Theodosius expelled them from *Rome* on the representations of the Christians. The opposite party then deputed one Simachus to petition the Emperor for their recall & the restoration of their houses and rents; these amounted to vast wealth, but the charities of the pious sisterhood were in proportion; indeed, so profuse were they of alms to the poor, that neither Roman nor stranger ever had to beg; for all that Theodosius would never consent to their recall. The name Vestal is derived from the Latin *vesta*, a hearth-fire; it was an appropriate figure of virginity, for a flame springs up & continues in lively movement, as a virgin, without ever giving off or receiving seed.

After thirty years of virginity they were permitted to marry, but few of them found happiness in the exchange; it is the same with those of our nuns who put off the veil to take a husband. On release from the discipline the Vestals behaved very proudly, dressing with great magnificence, as if in their persons they would claim the honours of the order; this characteristic is well described by the poet Prudentius, & we can well believe him, having seen the same in the canonesses of *Mons* in Hainault and of *Réaumont* in Lorraine, when they leave their convent to marry. Prudentius condemns the superb dresses and coaches in which the emancipated Vestals went about the town, and worse still visited the amphitheatre to see mortal combats of gladiators and wild beasts, as if they delighted in the sight of blood; in view of this scandal the poet begs the

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Emperor to abolish the bloody spectacle of mortal combats. Certainly Vestals should not wish to see such sports, even if they have quitted the order; but they might make this answer: 'We were so long deprived of the sports which other ladies enjoy as their right, and not being able to have double enjoyment of these now, we must make it up to ourselves with those of the arena.'

¶ Of widows there are some as chaste in their love as these virgins, I have known many such myself, and there are others who love to take their pleasure with men in secret, only not re-marrying because they prefer complete liberty of life; so that one must take care, before praising a widow for refraining from second marriage, to be sure that she belongs not to this latter class. And for this one needs to look close into their lives, for when a woman chooses to use her wits she can be cleverer than any, and will lead a man by the nose and sell him without his ever being aware of it; by her witcheries she will fog both eyes and mind, till her victim has no inkling of what she is. He will take the veriest whore for a Minerva, chaste and wise; ah! what a game can woman play, so sharp at once and tender as she is!

¶ I knew a great lady who continued in widowhood more than forty years, & was esteemed the most virtuous woman at Court or in the whole country; but *sotto covertò*, under cover, she was little better than a whore; maid, wife & widow she had been the same, but so cleverly had she gone about it, so guardedly had she plied the merry trade those fifty years that hardly had suspicion touched her when at seventy she died. That one had full value for her femininity, getting the pleasures and honours both! Once in the early days of her widowhood she fell in love with a young gentleman but could not lure him to action; so she went to his room one Innocents' Day to beat the lie-abed as the custom is; but it was the gentleman who took a rod to her, and a very different one from what she had brought. The lady endured it patiently, and it is said she even asked for more!

¶ I knew another lady who thus employed her widowhood some fifty

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years, always on her back to some gallant or another, while keeping up an appearance of saintly modesty; even on her death-bed she disowned, in a most innocent way, a man who had been her lover twelve years, and to whom in secret she had borne a son. Is there not reason for my warning, that before praising widows one should know something of their inner lives?

¶ Down, my pen! we must finish now or never. At once I hear the complaint of my critics that I have left out many stories & witticisms which would have illustrated my Discourse and have much improved it; I admit it freely, but should I have finished before the day of Judgment if I had included all? Let another do my work better, if there be any both able and willing, and he will have the thanks of the world.

¶ Ladies, adieu! and pray excuse me if I have said anything to offend you. It is not in my nature, nor has my training disposed me, to feel for you anything but respect and devotion. In speaking of certain ladies I do not speak of all, and I have been careful to disguise names and personalities. So well have I done this that it will be hard for any to recognize them; so if any scandal leak out it will be at the most a vague suspicion, unsupported by any proofs of identification. To readers in general I must apologise, if I have repeated any stories or sayings, that appeared in my previous Discourses; I fear it is only too likely that I have. My excuse to those who do me the honour to read the whole book is my poor memory, that cannot keep a record of all I have written; & in this weakness I can claim the fellowship of the great Plutarch, throughout whose works there are many repetitions. In any case I do not profess to be a man of letters, and hope that those who wish to print my books will have a competent person to revise and correct the whole.